

A
SHORT HISTORY
OF THE
WESTMINSTER FORUM:

CONTAINING,
SOME REMARKS UPON THE LAWS;
WHEREIN THE NATURE OF SUCH SOCIETIES
IS EXAMINED:

WITH
AN ABSTRACT OF EVERY EVENING'S DEBATE:
TOGETHER WITH
SOME LETTERS RELATIVE TO THE INSTITUTION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

BY THE PRESIDENT.

*Pulchrum est bene facere reipublicæ, etiam bene dicere hand
absurdum est. —SAL.*

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A SHORT
HISTORY
OF THE
WESTMINSTER FORUM.

FEBRUARY 17th, 1780.

*Which is more eligible, a state of Liberty
without Property, or a state of Property
without Liberty?*

LONG did the President stand, after he had read it out, as the subject of the evening's debate, without the least appearance of any one adopting it. Every person who entered the room, he hoped would be the proposer. Fruitless wish!—And surely a more disagreeable situation, either to the President, or the company, cannot be easily conceived, than when a total silence reigns. A Quaker's meeting may be ridiculous, yet not more insipid. Yea

VOL. II. B verily,

verily, greater joy doth not thrill in the bosom, and glisten in the eyes of the congregation of the pure, when an amiable young sister, of delicate shape, and winning softness, entreats them to keep themselves from all uncleanness, than that, which pervades a genteel company of Gentlemen and Ladies, when, after a tedious expectation of hearing animated speeches, some Speaker doth arise, and open the debate.

The brilliant company of to-night, had shewed signs of dissatisfaction, from the moment they heard the question. Several called—Another—Another.

At last a Gentleman spoke, and rejected it, because it met, he said, in extremes. After speaking about five minutes upon the matter, he seemed not pleased, with what he himself had said, therefore prayed the absolute dismissal of the question.

Another Gentleman declared, that the very terms militated against the native feelings of Englishmen. If fit to be debated any where, among civilized nations, it must be in France or Spain, where the Sovereign may almost take, or give, what he pleases: though, for his part, he judged the properest place and disputants, to be the roaming savage, in the pathless wood.

Shall I put the question then, said the President, as it hath been somewhat spoke to?

'Twould

'Twould be an insult to our understanding, replied a third—dismiss it ; which the Society at large assenting to, it was accordingly dismissed.

The President now recollecting, that he had a short time before received a letter, begging him to bring on a question, which had been unanimously accepted, withal promising, that one of them (for the epistle was wrote in a collective capacity) should open it—judged this the best time to comply with their request, therefore, read the following question :

Which can strike the clearest ideas, and display most to the human mind, the Painter or the Writer ?

He informed the company, of the letter he had received, and hoped, the promise therein contained, would now be fulfilled. No person arose, Read another—read another—came from several quarters in the room. Another and another was read, to no purpose ; when an ingenious Member rose, and observed,

Mr. President,

By going on at this rate, you will soon get to the end of your book ; and in the present temper of the Society, valuable questions may be rashly dismissed ; when the old quære will come in, " Cui Bono," To what purpose ?—Our time

time, and your breath, will be uselessly expended—discord may arise, while at last, we may find it necessary, to revert to some of the very questions we discard.

Another Gentleman moved—That the President should fix upon the question.

The President thanked him for the compliment, which he nevertheless insisted on declining; assuring him, that he would be far happier to hear the Society settle the point. With respect to what had fallen from the other learned Gentleman, he begged leave to inform him, and the company, of there being only a few questions on the book; which made him wish they would be pleased, either to fix upon one, or that any Gentleman present would be so obliging as to offer one, and support it.

A little after—the Attorney, who proposed the question about County Meetings, handed one to the chair, adding, that a Gentleman present would open it. On which the President gladly ordered silence, and read the following question :

Whether, in the present state of the Empire, a dissolution of Parliament would be of national advantage ?

Next informed them, the proposer meant to open the debate.

The

The Attorney replied, he had received it from another, nor was further concerned than in handing it forward.

Gentlemen, rejoined the President, this favours of trifling, and is highly disrespectful to a company like this. Did you require any proof but my word, I could appeal to the Gentlemen next the chair, if they did not hear the words I mentioned. Yes—yes—said several of them.

Stung by the justness of this reproach, the proposer rose, and made many apologies for his being unprepared on the question, which he hastily arranged in the fluctuating state of the evening, with a view to fix the attention, and foment something like argumentation.—The sooner, Mr. President, a dissolution takes place, the better for Great Britain and Ireland; seeing, in the hands of the present Parliament, the affairs of the one are almost ruined, and those of the other shamefully neglected. In the year 1774, the trade of this country seems to have reached the same zenith, that its glory did in 1759. Since that year, our commerce has been decaying in the most rapid, and alarming manner. Whoever wishes to collect the melancholy evidence; let him peruse the pages of the Custom-house volumes. Never were our exports and imports so great as then, and there is but a dreary prospect of their ever arising to the same rate.

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Since

Since the year 1774, what have we lost? The brightest, and most valuable jewel, in the British Crown! We have lost our Colonies, and with them our national importance—we have lost the trade of America, which was the natural, and would have remained, the permanent source of wealth. What is more, we have by our oppression, and other arbitrary measures, forfeited all claim to their affections. Their latest posterity will sigh and say—On this, and the other plain, this one, and that one, of my ancestors, lost a son—a brother—a husband—or a father—while exultingly they teach their children to know and admire the spots of ground, where a Warren and a Montgomery fell—two heroes, who would have done honour to the band that so gallantly defended the Streights of Thermopylæ. That hill once ran with British blood—the trenches were filled with the bodies of some of the bravest officers in the English army. From yonder island—a Putnam covered a glorious retreat. Here a Burgoyne failed—on that very spot the British arms were piled up, while a Gates—in the luxury of conquest—displayed a heroism, worthy the most virtuous days of Rome. During which a Washington, Fabius like, both guarded, and saved the liberties of his country.

One miserable consolation remains, namely, whether the present Parliament be now dissolved or not, men more capable of doing mischief, if we may judge from the practice, cannot be found.

The second Speaker took the opposite side of the question, and apprehended the reasoning of the Gentleman, who opened the debate, simply amounted to this—They have done wrong, let us put it out of their power to do right. Is this the way to mend matters? None will say so. It has been urged, that they themselves are now sensible of their error. Doth not this prove the very reverse of what the Gentleman meant? for who are so likely to amend, as those labouring under the conviction of their having once been wrong? Will not this render them eager to pursue a better track, that they may wipe away the reproach chargeable on their own understandings.

The Gentleman who followed him, spoke but a few words, to this effect :—It has, for a considerable time past, been a constant practice in Englishmen, to arraign the conduct of Parliaments: each in their day have been called bad, those not excepted, whom now we call good. Previous to the dissolution of the last, the cry became nearly universal, that a baser or more venal had never sat, within the walls of St. Ste-

phen—the opinion now is, that the present consists of still worse men; and worse being but the comparative degree, should the superlative come next, gracious Heaven! what a deplorable state must we then be in? Therefore I am clear against a dissolution.

The next Speaker thought, in the present situation of affairs, a new Parliament would be productive of no benefits to this country. His notions were; that human nature, in similar cases, and under equal temptations, was much the same. Happen the general election when it will, the same bribery and corruption as heretofore, would be apparent; nor can be stopt, till some expedient should be devised, for procuring an equal and genuine representation of the people, upon fair and constitutional grounds, and till, the enormous expenditure of public money was properly and legally confined.

The fifth in the debate, spoke somewhat in a confused unintelligible manner, about the declaratory act, with other extraneous matter; confessed this not to be to the question; said a few things on both sides; and concluded without determining on either.

The subsequent Speaker imagined a dissolution at this time, would prove an obstruction to many great designs of Government, and a hindrance to that success, which hath lately dawned upon

upon our arms, under the gallant Rodney. For, as hath been said, were it dissolved, the same influence would prevail, and the bulk of the same Members be returned; who, finding the sphere of their authority enlarged, together with the means of enriching themselves facilitated; to secure the latter, might still more notoriously abuse the former. We know there are even now, good men in Parliament, with whom the nation would reckon their dearest interests safe; but what, alas! can they effect, against the Minister's book of numbers? The majority must be good men, ere this country presume to exult. Such might, nay probably would be found, were annual Parliaments to take place; which ought the rather to be adopted, seeing the septennial act is manifestly a bad one, incapable of being defended on every maxim of sound policy, or principle of constitutional safety.

This Gentleman concluded with some judicious strictures on Parliaments in general, especially those under Edward III, Henry VIII, and George the I.

The next Speaker, contended that the Prerogative ought ever to be supported, and considered as sacred by the people. He told the Society, how much from his heart, he reprobated all attempts on the side of the people, to direct, or enforce matters, which composed part of the just prerogative

prerogative of the Crown. We have read of an Usurper, who, from motives of the blackest in-
 mate villainy, and under the mask of the deepest
 hypocrisy, stretched Prerogative a thousand de-
 grees farther, than the unhappy, though weak
 Prince, whom he brought to the block. But,
 Mr. President, what honest man—what English-
 man—doth not abhor his name? of whose
 family, Providence, as a proof of its displeasure,
 hath not left a surviving branch! Who ever
 palliated his guilt, or praised his achievements,
 save a female Quixote? Her erudition casts
 a lustre on her sex. 'Tis not depreciating her
 very great merit, to say, that her party-spirit car-
 ried her to extremes. To return to the question.
 Is the present Parliament, so obnoxious to the
 people, as we are taught to believe? Permit
 me to doubt it. In war time, particularly the
 beginning thereof, if things go rather cross
 with us—a circumstance not uncommon—com-
 plaints against Parliaments have been loudly
 preferred, and elaborately maintained, by Coffee-
 house politicians; on which grounds, I venture
 to call the present, the old story over again, and
 only things of course.

One Gentleman hath exclaimed against septen-
 nial Parliaments. From him also, I beg leave to
 differ, being clearly of opinion, that they are
 consonant to the spirit of the constitution, and
 in

in themselves exceeding just and proper. What dissipation, and debauchery, of every kind, reigns among the lower ranks of people, during a general election ! What stabs doth sober industry then receive ! What temptations are laid in the way of conscience, and moral rectitude ! And shall we multiply these, or pursue measures which would add vigour to the opportunities ? Forbid it Policy !—and forbid it Virtue !

Again, if Parliament consists of men of character and integrity, can they sit too long ? And if the electors return improper persons at one time, would they be more careful at another ? Since an election comes round only once in seven years ; it is reasonable to suppose greater caution used, than if it was annual ; in which case, the people would naturally reason thus :—'Tis no great matter, should my Lord this—or Squire that—now get in, for you know, if he does abuse the trust, next year, it will be in our power to reject him.

In a word, were a dissolution to happen at this singular crisis, it implies one or the other of these considerations—either, that they were odious to the Crown, or to the people : and the inferences from both, are of such a nature, as must stamp it sound policy to shun them if possible.

The Gentleman who followed in the debate,
whether

whether considered as such—as a friend—or as a man of sense, merits our highest praise. From the first institution of the Westminster Forum, he had displayed an unfeigned attachment to its welfare. He made a point of attending it, though frequently very inconvenient to himself; nor did his closeness of reasoning, and ready elocution, ever miss of striking the attention of the audience, or of gaining their applause. Commerce was the first walk in life which this Gentleman pursued. By accident, several years ago, he was led to the Robinhood Society; now no more, but then in vogue. He spoke, and met well-earned encouragement. A regularity in attendance upon such places, quickly gained him the appellation of a good Speaker. He has often filled the chair in different Societies, with honour to himself, and satisfaction to them.

During the period alluded to, he frequently with his pen assisted the distressed, or, according to his knowledge, did friendly offices to the indigent. Let the pages he wrote for Bruickshaw, witness the first,—and many, notorious acts of his private life prove the latter. His abilities gradually procured him patrons, at whose importunity he quitted all thoughts of a mercantile life, and commenced Student in the Temple, where he hath studied for some time past.

past. When he comes to appear at the bar, there is not a doubt, but the public suffrage will reward his studies, and the causes entrusted to him, will neither be indifferently meditated upon, nor injudiciously argued.

He observed upon the question—That, if we cannot be injured, we may be bettered. It has been argued this evening, Mr. President, that the Americans, have been long preparing for those disastrous events, under which, we at present being burthened, do so heavily complain; the amount whereof, simply is, that they, exercising their own good understanding, determined, like heroes sprung from a venerable stock, to oppose the strides of Ministerial influence, and unwarrantable manœuvres. In doing so, they deserve not censure, but the warmest praise.

With respect to our situation at home, I believe, Sir, there never was a period, when there appeared a greater prospect of virtue among the people, than now; consequently it was the fittest time to trust them with an election. As awakened from a dream, they saw their interest, and would shew themselves Britons in the supporting of it.

Besides, the business is now before Parliament. They have given leave to bring these
Petitions

Petitions in, for a very good reason ; they durst not deny it—but have they befriended them ? nay, have they had complaisance enough to receive them pleasantly ? Have they been at neither pains nor expence to vilify, if they are unable to frustrate them ? These are plain, yet home queries.

Much has been said about the situation of our affairs, as they relate to an enemy. Where lies the force of the argument ? I profess it does not strike me. What advantage could a dissolution of the present Parliament be to an enemy ? We can easily conceive, Sir, how it might damp them. Their affairs could never go on better, nor their designs be less counteracted, under any other Administration. If it be true, that the Americans were wont to give as a toast, the continuation of a G— or H— in command, surely, France and Spain may, with equal propriety, wish the duration of the present Parliament. Our enemies know this Parliament is hated by the people ; whereas were a set of men returned, more agreeable to the mind of the nation, from mutual esteem and confidence being restored between the Representatives, and the Represented, more vigorous schemes might be planned against them, and the execution committed to more able and enterprizing hands, than for some time have been most carested.

The

The subsequent Speaker was a young citizen of London, well acquainted with the nature of such argumentation, having often been in the Chair at Coachmakers Hall,—a Member of their Committee, and withal an intrepid, sensible, and easy Speaker.

He vindicated the æra of the Usurper—declaring, that the internal happiness and security of Englishmen were never greater—that Britain never so nobly wore the laurel—firmly held the balance of power in Europe—or was so respected in the eyes of surrounding nations, as in the days of Oliver Cromwell. Then the British name resembled those of ancient Rome; nor at that period was it safer to injure an Englishman, either in his person or property, than it would have been to assault a Roman, during the virtuous days of the republic. Under his protection also, commerce flourished at home, public credit was unsuspected, and justice uniformly administered, through every department of Government, and in every corner of the empire. He perfectly coincided with his learned friend, in thinking there now dawned a brighter ray, than what this once happy country had seen, in the too long reign of this Administration. Nor did he less approve of what the last Speaker alluded to, in the former sentence announced, about the effects a
dissolution

dissolution of the present Parliament, would have upon our enemies ; to which he subjoined, that such a measure might facilitate a reconciliation with the Americans, to whom the Ministry and Parliament are contemptibly odious ; of whose insincerity, and want of principle, the people of that country are so experimentally convinced, that, like the man and the serpent in the fable, while each remembers his loss, it is impossible friendship should exist. Like the man, the Americans must recollect their slaughtered sons—their plundered fields—with the more than savage burning of their towns and villages ; while, like the serpent, Administration, cannot forget their frustrated schemes—their captived armies, together with the almost unvaried succession of their notorious disgraces. Thanks to Heaven ! the people of this country seem now awakening from their political lethargy ; we hope their object will be the support of constitutional freedom, and to administer wholesome, yet strengthening draughts, to expiring commerce. We can easier tell what a virtuous people have done, in different periods, and quarters of the globe, than attempt to paint what the British Lion, once more aroused, may gloriously accomplish.

The friend of Administration, replied to the

two

two preceding Speakers, in a very sensible and pointed manner. The inconveniences attending a general election, he displayed in the strongest colouring. He further apprehended, that the numerous bands of soldiers necessary to be kept at this time, might produce disagreeable consequences—blended, as he thought they must be, with the electors, and the animosities that generally prevail on these occasions.

If the people groaned beneath peculiar grievances, he judged it their duty to lay these before Parliament; in whom such a quantum of virtue still existed, as entitled the Petitioners to expect redress, provided their complaints were justly founded.

That the proposed dissolution had the smallest tendency to bring about a reconciliation with America, he looked on, as an idea quite Utopian; that people having long ago meditated independency, and, previous to the origin of the present contest, could be proved to have busied herself, in making every suitable preparation for what has happened.

As to our enemies—they will learn our divisions with joy, and while, like the lion and tyger, Britons wrangle for superiority, or nugatory distinctions, among themselves, the French and Spaniards, like cunning foxes, watching the weakness occasioned by the dispute, will run

away with the prize; whereby we mean, they will destroy our interest, or further tarnish our national glory: consequently, let the Parliament sit on, and our line of duty is to give vigour to their operations, by our unanimity. If a house divided against itself cannot stand, no more can a nation disunited in its councils prosper.

I cannot sit down without owning, Mr. President, I did not expect this evening to have heard a panegyric upon Oliver Cromwell—that worst of men—that regicide—that basest hypocrite—that usurper—that tyrant. With equal propriety might we allude to Nero for clemency, or to Jefferies for justice, as to the character of the Protector, for arguments to maintain the cause of British freedom. A Protector, falsely so named, who dragooned Parliament out of their places, to make way for fitter instruments of his own iniquity, and cursed ambition.

The proposer of the question, being called upon from the chair, rose to conclude. He began by introducing this simile—Suppose a man discovered, however late, that his servants had embezzled every thing which he possessed of value, and that they stood convicted of the crime, but promised to behave better in future; would that, even allowing the rectitude of their intention, in the eye of law or reason, be deemed an apology? or, upon the proofs of such a crime being

being brought home, would any man in his senses, harbour such servants an hour longer? Would he listen to—much less be influenced by—the far-fetched reflection, that their successors might rob him of the little that remained? Such a mode of reasoning must effectually be subversive of all industry, prudence, or indeed of human operation.

It is applicable to the point in hand, to say, the repeal of the Stamp Act convinced the Americans, that Government meant what they said. Nothing inferior can answer the purpose now. Repeal the Boston Port Bill—the Prohibitory Act—together with all those of which the United States complain: though, after this is done, it will be only a poor atonement for the victims slain, and the millions of money expended. Can we rest satisfied, when the more immediate instruments of this complicated distress, continue to rule over us!—vote away our money—and dispose of our lives? From these, with many other similar reasons, I really think a dissolution of the present Parliament, is a circumstance, devoutly to be wished.

On the question being put—It was carried, by a great majority—that a dissolution of Parliament, in the present state of the Empire, would be of national advantage.

F E B R U A R Y 21, 1780.

Are not the Bishops, and others the Clergy, who have denied their support, and assistance, to the Protestant Association, highly culpable in so doing ?

IT being a rule in the Society, not to admit religious questions, lest they should be treated with a levity and indiscretion, unsuitable to the majesty of religion, and the solemn importance of its momentous truths ; — the President thought it proper thus to accost the company :

Gentlemen, acquainted with the laws of the Forum, may perhaps be induced to think, that the present question, is an infringement on them. For the chair to be the means of doing so, would be unpardonable indeed. Had the matter not appeared otherwise to me, it never should have been admitted. The propriety, and ease of discussing it, in a political manner, added to the very interesting nature of it at this period, when thousands stand in Associations relative thereto, became the motives, which prompted us to advertise it for debate.

The

The celebrated Locke—whose ideas, however exploded by those now in power, have been, are, and will continue to be the admiration of sensible men, in all ages of the world—viewed the purport of this question, as closely interwoven with the fundamentals of civil society. In his first letter on Toleration, thus writes that great man :—

“ No opinions contrary to human society, or
 “ to those moral rules, which are necessary to
 “ the preservation of civil society, are to be to-
 “ lerated by the magistrate. Another more
 “ secret evil, but more dangerous to the com-
 “ monwealth, is, when men arrogate to them-
 “ selves, and to those of their own sect, some
 “ peculiar prerogative, covered over with a
 “ specious shew of deceitful words, but in effect
 “ opposite to the civil right of the community.
 “ For example: We cannot find any sect that
 “ teaches expressly and openly, that men are
 “ not obliged to keep their promise; that Prin-
 “ ces may be dethroned, by those that differ
 “ from them in religion; or that the dominion
 “ of all things belongs only to themselves. For
 “ these things, proposed thus nakedly and plain-
 “ ly, would soon draw on them the eye and
 “ hand of the magistrate, and awaken all the
 “ care of the commonwealth, to a watchfulness

“ against the spreading so dangerous an evil;
 “ But, nevertheless, we find those that say the
 “ same things in other words. What else do
 “ they mean, who teach that faith is not to be
 “ kept with heretics? Their meaning, forsooth,
 “ is, that the privilege of breaking faith be-
 “ longs unto themselves: for they declare, all
 “ that are not of their communion, to be here-
 “ tics; or at least, may declare them so, whenso-
 “ ever they think fit. What can be the mean-
 “ ing of their asserting, that Kings excommu-
 “ nicated forfeit their crowns and kingdoms?
 “ It is evident, that they thereby arrogate unto
 “ themselves the power of deposing Kings, be-
 “ cause they challenge the power of excommu-
 “ nication, as the peculiar right of their hierar-
 “ chy. That dominion is founded in grace, is
 “ also an assertion, by which those that maintain
 “ it, do plainly lay claim to the possession of
 “ all things. For they are not so wanting to
 “ themselves, as not to believe, or at least
 “ as not to profess, themselves to be the truly
 “ pious and faithful. These therefore, and the
 “ like, who attribute unto the faithful, religi-
 “ ous, and orthodox—that is, in plain terms, un-
 “ to themselves—any peculiar privilege or power
 “ above other mortals, in civil concernments;
 “ or who, upon pretence of religion, do chal-
 “ lenge

" lence any manner of authority over such as
 " are not associated with them in their eccle-
 " siastical dominion ; I say, these have no right
 " to be tolerated by the magistrate ; as neither
 " those, that will not own and teach the duty
 " of tolerating all men, in matters of mere reli-
 " gion. For what do all these, and the like
 " doctrines signify, but that they may, and are
 " ready upon any occasion to seize the Go-
 " vernment, and possess themselves of the estates
 " and fortunes of their fellow-subjects : and
 " that they only ask leave to be tolerated by the
 " magistrate so long, until they find them-
 " selves strong enough to effect it ?"

Again : " That church can have no right
 " to be tolerated by the magistrate, which is
 " constituted upon such a bottom, that all those
 " who enter into it, do thereby *ipso facto* de-
 " liver themselves up to the protection and ser-
 " vice of another Prince. For by this means,
 " the Magistrate would give way to the set-
 " tling of a foreign jurisdiction in his own
 " country, and suffer his own people to be list-
 " ed, as it were, for soldiers, against his own
 " government. Nor does the frivolous and fal-
 " lacious distinction, between the Court and the
 " Church, afford any remedy to this inconve-
 " nience ; especially, when both the one and

" the other, are equally subject to the absolute
 " authority of the same person ; who has not
 " only power to persuade the members of his
 " church, to whatsoever he lists, either as pure-
 " ly religious, or as in order thereunto, but
 " can also enjoin it them, on pain of eternal
 " fire."

This immortal writer mentions another class
 of men, not to be tolerated ; namely, those who
 deny the Being of a God ; but these, not being
 implied any how in the question before us ;
 what has been quoted, I trust, is sufficient to
 point out that line of argumentation, which we
 hope the Gentlemen, who may favour us with
 their sentiments on the subject, will both im-
 prove, and preserve.

The proposer, who probably was a Member
 of the Protestant Association, did not chuse to
 open it. He seemed a modest, genteel young
 man, constantly attended, though he never
 spoke.

A worthy Cleric, who would reckon himself
 honoured, in being intimately acquainted with
 my Lords the Bishops, found fault with the
 terms of the question ; therefore moved, that
 instead of the particular allusion to the Bishops,
 and the Clergy, the words—Protestants in ge-
 neral, should be substituted.

It

It was replied—Such an alteration is a total change of the question, consequently inadmissible.

The President took the sense of the Society, who determined, that the question should stand as first read from the chair.

A Clergyman opened the debate, who has that interest much at heart—has been at great pains to inform himself of every particular connected with the controversy—and is far from being a weak or injudicious speaker. His language is simple and easy—his elocution unaffected—and his argument solid and clear.

He set out, by giving us an account of the manner, wherein the repeal complained of was procured; specified the part which one of the Judges, called Lords of Session, in Scotland, had acted—the application to the titular Bishop Hey—the scheme—the success—among other effects; that, on the 1st of May, 1778, an elegantly-drawn-up petition, presented by Roman Catholics, induced those in power to refer the matter to his Majesty. One great view doubtless was, to pave the way for an easier introduction of their sons into the navy and army. Sir George S—— that upright man, and venerable Patriot—by what strange infatuation we know not, patronized the matter, and moved for a repeal of the penal laws against Popery, in general.

Amidst

Amidst the various professions of candour made on the one side, and the well-spun disguises on the other, it nevertheless may be discerned, that the whole had been preconcerted, and brought forward with the nicest skill. Some abettors of the Bill have averred, that it passed unanimously—they overlook, for it is unreasonable to think they forget, the opposition made by Wellbore Ellis, and the Chancellor, who was then in the House of Commons; and by the truly upright Lord Bishop of Peterborough, in the House of Lords.

Popery either is, or is not, an evil. Need I tell you, Mr. President, or this respectable Society, that good and evil are immutable in their natures; nor can legislators, from maxims of philosophy, policy, or reason, tolerate an evil. We have heard it urged, be the nature, and spirit of Popery, what it may, the toleration of it proceeds from philanthropy, and enlarged views of public utility, and from what is judged reasonable and expedient, as things are at this time situated; apprehending the notion of its being an evil, to arise—from prejudice—from what it once was—or fears of what it may be, more than the fair examination of what it actually is. How specious—yet how flimsy the argument!—for since it is capable of the clearest demonstration,

tion, that Popery is an evil, what legislature can separate between the appearance, and the reality. All lawgivers have confessed, the impossibility of preventing all evils; but was ever any so absurd, as to introduce what he knew to be inherently such, especially where he could adduce no other cause for so doing, save that it was somewhat differently modified from what it used to be? If it is not an evil now, it never was,—for it hath altered none of its essential tenets, only from necessity abated a little of the rigor, wherewith it formerly enforced them; but at the Reformation, and frequently since, it hath been thought an evil—therefore it is one still.

We have also, Sir, heard it asserted, that Popery is an assemblage of opinions, merely speculative, and perfectly innocent. Was it in the presence of Majesty itself, where my ears were gratified with such worse than Filmerian doctrine, I would use the birthright of an Englishman, and thunder in reply—then the Revolution was an unwarrantable crime. We are hereby reduced to the necessity of acknowledging, either that James was expelled from the throne, or that from his well-known attachment to Popery, with his design of re-establishing it again in these realms,

realms, he incapacitated himself for the British throne.

No peal is oftener rung, than that Popery is altered—ay, say they, and much for the better; the fiery persecuting particles are evaporated; nothing remains but submission to whatever government they chanced to live under. Would to God it were so—from that supposition, the Pope is stript of his usurped authority. Give me leave to question it. The spirit of that religion necessarily must be intolerant, and supported by fire and faggot; because its tenets insult the human understanding, and positively enjoin as essentials, the grossest contradictions. As hath been already said, a thousand reasons may concur, to debar the operations of its spirit, yet under all these, its nature continues the same. Individuals, we allow, may be changed—Popery is not.

Another assertion, equally groundless, is—that Popery is not tolerated by the Bill. Very strange indeed! Pray how do Papists understand it? Facts give evidence. They purchase lands—print and publish books: they have opened mass-houses, and schools, in every part of the kingdom, especially, in, and near, the metropolis. What advantage hath the Dissenter now, over the Roman Catholic? I profess, I know

of none. If this be not toleration, to what shall we ascribe the name !

The Gentleman who spoke next, animadverted exceedingly severely upon the characters of the Gentlemen who supported the Protestant Association. He thought the minds of men were now so irradiated by genuine philosophy, that not the least danger remained of their ever being again warped by gross nonsense, or the juggle of priestcraft. Religion, in these days, was as devoid of pomp and glare, as it once had been of truth and simplicity. Every man now thought for himself, and gloried, that in these matters he was, "*addictus jurare in verba nullius magistri.*" What mischief then can Popery effect, or where lies the so-hideously-depicted evil of it ?

I am of opinion, Mr. President, that all religions are the same. A man ought to abide by what he is brought up in, or conform to that of the Government he lives under, without troubling himself any farther about the matter. Religion, I call the shadow—morality is the substance ; provided there are no deviations from the last of these ; 'tis extremely frivolous to dispute about the first. While the rules of justice and friendship, with the dictates of benevolence and compassion, are punctually attended to ;

to; it signifies not a straw, whether a man be Protestant — Papist — Jew — Mahometan — or Heathen.

Persecution in every sense is to be reprobated; nor did the Devil ever make mankind so like himself, as when he got them to persecute one another for religious dogmas. After all the opener of the question hath so elaborately said, about their not keeping promises, the fact remains to be proved. In the ordinary dealings of life, are they not equal in honesty and fidelity to ourselves? If this holds—where they are most immediately concerned, will they be apt to forfeit it in matters, more remotely pertaining to them. The Gentleman hath granted individuals are amended, then surely their principles will not hurt us.

Here some of the company began to hiss; on which the Gentleman said—This Forum, famed for its candour, and the decency wherewith it is conducted, calmly hears arguments in favour of civil liberty: why deny it to one, who stands up, as I do, an advocate for a religious kind?

The President craved audience. He most poignantly, reproved the hissers, as he had often done before: telling them, how unbecoming the character of Gentlemen the practice was—how hurtful to the nature of debate! and how discouraging

couraging to young Speakers, who were apt thereby, to be deterred from mingling in the argument. Besides, those who entertained different sentiments from the applauded Speakers, might not hazard receiving the illiberal marks of disapprobation, so frequently, and very often so unjustly bestowed. A serpent may hiss—it requires judgment to argue. How much more manly, by reasoning to confute, than meanly to perplex? Yet among the insignificant group of hisfers, we seldom find a Speaker. I believe, Sir, you may fairly presume, those who hiss you, are wholly unable to answer you. Go on, —if you please, Sir.

The Society applauded the rebuke, yet the Speaker, though thus animated, went no farther in the debate: except inferring, from the silence the Bishops observed, when the Bill passed, that they apprehended no bad effects likely to ensue the toleration.

The next Speaker thought that a man ought not to mind religious principles, so long as those received into the community did not avail themselves of the contrary. Who, Mr. President, are the Bishops? A set of men, who, for the most part past the meridian of life, ere they attain the dignity; are more inclined to spend the remainder of their days in luxury and ease, than in the active exertions of their authority,

thority, or duties of their office. They admire our happy constitution—they bless, and pray for the church—call it the best and purest in the world. As to the low and laborious duties of it, such as preaching—visiting the sick—catechising—the charge of souls—and the like; they leave to those who earn their subsistence by it—they, pious spirits! thank their better stars, and rejoice that they can live in quiet. The mode in which they understand their function, is, to be Courtiers, not Divines. Here they confirm the late Lord Chesterfield's observation, who used to call them, the dead votes of the Minister.—The end, which originally determined Government to grant them a part in the legislature, was certainly good, namely, that they might be the guardians of the established religion of the country, and prevent any innovations therein. Instead of treading the steps of the Apostles, they chuse to keep pace with the chariot of the Minister. Some of them more closely study him, the Instrument of their exaltation, than him, who preached salvation to the Gentiles.

On the other hand, what is Popery? A mass of ignorance—superstition—and tyranny, tending not only to the destruction of civil liberty, but also of divine jurisprudence. That it hath not changed its spirit, we appeal to the various periods

periods wherein it hath had an opportunity of shewing itself. See the violent persecutions of the Lollards—that which took place in this country, in the year 1600—the cursed attempt of Guy Faux—the massacre of Protestants in Ireland—and the adoption of Machiavelian origin, that religion is not of service, further, than it conduces to civil policy. Ought not such considerations entirely to dissuade us from encouraging a Church, of whose temperament, these are but a few of the direful consequences? Had the weight of the mitre not lulled our Bishops to sleep, they certainly would lift up their voice against the present innovations, for that they are so, every one must know, who hath the least acquaintance with former acts of the British Legislature: nay, self-interest, to which they are seldom blind, ought to excite them to the performance of their duty: for granting, they might be so tempted by the Devil, as rather to embrace the Church of Rome, than a scaffold or a stake, there would be little chance of their ever obtaining Bishoprics again. In fine, what must be the degeneracy of the age, when the most Reverend Fathers in God, are unconcerned, about maintaining the purity of His worship? Little regard can the keepers have for the master of the vineyard, who tamely suffer the walls to be broken down.

The fourth Speaker affirmed, that the Bishops had contributed, as much as in them lay, to bring on an unjust war with America; and to embroil us with antient and powerful rivals; which had well nigh ruined the nation. At no period did they oppose the measures of the present Administration; of course, may be considered as part of the cause producing the complicated distresses, and still gloomier prospects of this country. Here part of the company hissed—

Which the President again eagerly checked, and encouraged the Speaker.

Who in a firm tone assured them, that he, for his part, was above the generality of hissers, nor would be influenced by them.

A loud laugh next ensued—the observation bordering on a pun, seeing he locally stood on one of the highest benches in the Forum. He proceeded—

King James acted inimical to the spirit of the constitution, and every lover of his country rejoiced in heart, when he was forced to abdicate. Thank God! in this country, Bishops are not above Kings; therefore if they act contrary to, or fail in, the essential duties of their high rank, he held them to be incompetent to it, nor imagined it unjustifiable, should mankind tumble them from their bench, for they seldom use their pulpits. Mr. President, in my estimation,

estimation, lawn sleeves are nothing, in comparison of what some people think them—they only serve to render the wearers contemptible, if unsupported; by becoming zeal and genuine piety.

He concluded—by telling us a dream he lately had, respecting an universal toleration; and that Priests of the Romish persuasion, might receive tythes as well as the Christian Bishops; his real opinion, being, that it was one of the glaring follies of the age, for men to give one tenth part so much as they did, either to the one, or to the other.

The subsequent Speaker, rose with all the acrimony of invective, against the Members of the Protestant Association. Mr. President, who are they? Like Falstaff's soldiers, a motley group—collected from every class and denomination—unacquainted with each other—not more different in character, than in sentiment—and their leaders of a cast, unlikely to reduce them into regularity, or fix their views on any one line of conduct. From these circumstances their operations want vigour; they neither can, nor ought to succeed. The very priests among them are like Jeroboam's, in ancient times, from the lowest of the people. Scarce any belong to them, who have enjoyed an University education. The most respectable

also among the Dissenters, both pastors and people, reprobate them; wisely arguing, the unfairness, and want of charity it would be in them, who so amply enjoy toleration, to appear advocates, against its being extended to others.

During the time he uttered the above, the Society, to their honour be it said, testified their dissatisfaction; while the President, in compliance with what he discerned, to be the general sense of the company, begged leave to caution the Speaker against illiberality, and to remind him, that it would look better, and be more agreeable to the laws of the Forum, if he spoke to the point, in place of reviling characters, of whom he perhaps did not know, one, in a thousand.

The Speaker rejoined—he claimed an equal privilege with those who had reviled the Bishops; and if their obloquy against the order, had been admitted, he insisted on his right to retaliate, and to use, if he pleased, the scales they had used.

But to the question. After all—what do these Associators complain of?—of fancied evils, and imaginary grievances. With a solemn gravity, and unmeaning concern, they frighten women and fools; while they harangue us upon, not what happened from the latitude given Papists, but what their second sight, for no natural kind of sight would answer the purpose, foresees they
may

may atchieve in some future period. Does not, Sir, their conduct bear the stamp of faction? their hypocritical cloaks are larger than the modern calash, and conceal the actual purport, more than the latter do the face.

How laughable, Mr. President, to see them have a meeting in one place, rather than another, because a Society meets there, who are supposed to be inimical to Government, and who execrate the present Ministry, though the least acquaintance with history informs us, that no civil discords were ever half so cruel, or occasioned half the bloodshed, which trifling disputes, masked with religion have done.

Without some small share of brains, there must be absurdities. If Bedlamites preside, disorder must ensue. We have perused a pamphlet, called an Agreement of the People. Doubtless, Scotch Presbyterians, and English Independants, will make a glorious mixture. What man in his senses, can condemn my Lords the Bishops, for refusing their countenance to such a spotted Assembly, under the direction of an ——— Nobleman, and an ——— Attorney.

Of this same Protestant Association, we can justly say, they resemble those edged tools in the reformation under Queen Elizabeth, being some of the very worst of men; if we derive our

ideas, either from their principles or abilities. In an after period, an upstart Bradshaw, pretended, like his master in hypocrisy, still more than in power, a mighty care for religion, with uncommon apprehensions of its being in danger; whose tender conscience, however, did not prevent his sitting in the scorners chair, and, dreaming that appearances gave authority, passed sentence on his Sovereign.

But again—Mr. President, Does the venerable Bench of Bishops—the conservators of our religious rights, and magazines of piety, (here there was a general laugh in the Society) deserve the censure wherewith they have been so plentifully loaded this evening? Are there not among them, men of the most amiable private virtues, and of distinguished abilities? Need I name a W——n — a L——h — a H———, the Dean of W———r — or a P——s? From the picture drawn of that respectable part of our Legislative Body, by a Gentleman opposite to me, a stranger to them might conjecture they were all Deists, or rather a set of men totally devoid of religion of any kind. How false as well as barefaced the assertion! To prove this—permit me to quote a passage from a Sermon preached on the Fast Day, in the year 1776, before the House of Lords, by Richard Lord Bishop of Litchfield and Coventry,

“ Infinite,

"Infinite, says the venerable Prelate, "are the
 "benefits that descend upon us, from our well-
 "reformed religion, and from the watchful
 "care of Heaven in the support and protection
 "of it. Yet, who reflects on these things?
 "Should we so much as hear a word on the sub-
 "ject, if it did not suit the purpose, sometimes,
 "of peevish men, and parties among us, to re-
 "vive the memory of it? Have we even a de-
 "cent regard for the honour of our great re-
 "formers? And is not the little zeal we have
 "left for Protestantism itself, spent in idle ca-
 "vils at the stupendous work, atchieved by
 "their hands?

"But why speak I of reformed religion? Is
 "there any of us, almost, who is animated
 "with that zeal for Christianity itself, which
 "glowed in the breasts of our fathers?

"Too many proclaim their disbelief of it,
 "nay, their utter contempt of all that is called
 "religion; and yet appear to give no offence
 "(where, methinks, it should be taken) by their
 "manifest, their avowed, their ostentatious im-
 "pieties. Is it not even growing into a maxim,
 "in certain quarters, that religion, or irreligion,
 "is a matter of no moment in the characters of
 "men, and that none, but a bigot, is affected
 "by that distinction?

"It is true, the wiser, and, in every sense of

“ the word, better, part of the public have an
 “ abhorrence of this profligacy. They profess,
 “ and without doubt entertain, a respect for the
 “ authority of their divine religion. Yet who
 “ has not observed, that more than a few of
 “ these reduce that authority to just nothing,
 “ and, in a sort of philosophical delirium, are for
 “ setting up their reason, that is, their own
 “ authority, in its stead.

“ Even we, of the Clergy, have we not some
 “ need to be put in mind of doing our first
 “ works, and of returning to our first love?
 “ Has not the contagion of the times sicklied
 “ over the complexion of even our zeal and
 “ charity, while we neither repel the enemies of
 “ the faith, with that vigour, nor confirm the
 “ faithful themselves, with that vigilance, which
 “ did so much honour to our predecessors in
 “ the sacred ministry.” Thus far the Prelate.

Does this look like neglect of religion? Does
 it breathe the spirit of indifference concerning
 it? Is this the language of a man who doth not
 understand it? On the contrary, doth it not
 convict their absurdity, who rail at the order
 from party spirit? it also shews the degeneracy
 of the age we live in, which, almost disrobed
 of moral principles, never fails to applaud the
 lowest species of ridicule, if it runs against the
 Clergy.

To

To conclude : Mr. President, I think it exceeding good policy in the State to tolerate Popery ; because it exalts the notions of our liberality among others—diminishes the force of prejudice among ourselves—and proves efficient of strength to the kingdom, and at a crisis too, when we peculiarly need support against the perfidy and ambition of the House of Bourbon, so powerfully aided by the prowess, and firmness of America.

He was followed by a Gentleman, who contented himself, with making a kind of general panegyric upon the Protestant Association ; wherein he tried to vindicate them from the imputation of a factious or narrow spirit, by pleading their invitation to Protestants of every sect, and of tenets however diverse.

Their great object, Sir, is, to prevent Papists from obtaining influence in civil matters ; which nothing could hinder, but a repeal of those acts lately passed in their favour. In my opinion, the Bishops are more than blameable : they forfeit their character, and cease to merit esteem, from the moment their actions indicate, that according to their mode of thinking, one religion is as good as another. How little short of this did their acquiescence to the Quebec Bill, and to the late repeal come ? Can any be ignorant, that the Roman Catholics absolutely justify, nay, hold the persecution of those differing in opinion

nion from them, to be essential and meritorious; a tenet fit to increase the tumult of Hell; and which, to the honour of human nature be it spoke, all Protestants detest and abhor: add hereto — their permitting with impunity the violation of contracts, promises, &c. with those they are pleased to dub heretics, are matters so repugnant to morality, and good order in society; that the State, which doth not by wise regulations provide against their encroachments, lays the foundation of its own destruction.

The next Speaker, was a Gentleman of very great learning, and eminent abilities, though nature, partial in her gifts, had denied him the qualities of an Orator. The easiness of his fortune, probably, induced him to decline frequent appearances at the bar: yet there is not the shadow of a doubt, but his good sense would sufficiently repay the attention of those who heard him. He had favoured the Westminster Forum with his speeches several times before this. He never deviated from the question, nor handled it weakly. He knew the constitution of this country well, and was skilled in drawing the most judicious inferences from its present state. He was rather formal in his mode of elocution, and, to render him a pleasing Speaker, wanted only animation: if he did not rouse the passions, he assailed the judgment; though perhaps at this time

time he could not engage attention, save among those, who nicely discerned between the matter, and the manner.

Having noticed, with his usual precision, how far several of the Speakers had misunderstood the nature of the repeal complained of—he informed the President, that he had brought the act alluded to, in his pocket; which he offered to read, or hand to the chair to be read.

The President objected to both these alternatives, as it would be establishing a bad precedent for future times, and in itself would necessarily retard the debate. The Society concurring in opinion, led him to drop the motion, and directly speak to the question.

He with great accuracy quoted largely from the act—and, with all the clearness of a well-read lawyer, mentioned a sufficiency of acts against Roman Catholics still in force, to remove the dreadful anxiety under which the Associators seemed to labour.

There is, Sir, an act unrepealed, inflicting a penalty of 20 l. for attending divine service every Sunday. No Papist can sit in the House, therefore their having landed property is not so great an evil as some would have us imagine: seeing they must vote for Protestants. By the 1st of William and Mary, restraints severely hard were laid upon Papists. A married woman refusing
to

to conform, was liable to perpetual imprisonment, unless her husband redeemed her by paying 10 l. a month—or at once surrendered his whole estate. Another law on record requires persons convicted of Popery, to abjure the realm. By another law, viz. the 30th of Charles, none can sit in the House, either of Peers, or Commons, without an oath renouncing Popery. Nor does the act complained of, viz. the 18th of his present Majesty, imply so much as is represented. We admit it takes away that part intitling the convictor of a Popish priest, exercising his religion, to 100 l. Is this a grievance? Surely no! the contrary being an insult to the candour of Englishmen, and an encouragement to idleness, if not to wickedness. Much has been urged against their keeping schools; not, however, we imagine, with much justice, far less propriety. The granting them this privilege, appears to be founded on wise principles—contrary to which, if they presume to act—then punish them according to law, like other culprits: in order to prevent Protestantism from wearing the garb of Popery. Enough are they deprived of—when they possess not all the privileges of citizens. The bulk of this country are Protestants, equally from a dread of civil, as of religious tyranny; and were there no other reason than that the Pope is an absolute Prince, I trust a period shall never arrive,

arrive, when Englishmen would bend to his sceptre. We have enough of civil dissensions at this melancholy crisis; why increase these, by adding the fumes of fanaticism? In a word, Papists had no power of obtaining the act in question, nor have they done any thing to deserve the repeal. Wherefore, instead of reviling dignities, I rather commend the Bishops, for their liberality and prudence, shewn in taking no active part with the Protestant Association of this country, as it stands at present.

The eighth Speaker said little, and that not much to the purpose. He declared he was a Protestant—that he hated Popery—and also the Bishops; not for their meddling in religious concerns, which he thought to be indeed very cruel, seeing it laid them under an imputation entirely groundless, and arraigned them for that, of which they were perfectly ignorant: but his resentment proceeded from their being tools of a Court, and the painted, at least lawn-covered sepulchres of ministerial iniquity.

The ninth Gentleman who mingled in the debate, contended we were not in immediate fears of persecution from Popery. The manners of the present age, Mr. President, are such, that should the hell-born Demon arise, there is no probability of its ever coming near us—for righteousness sake.

The

The short history of the matter in debate is this :—A motion was made in 1778, for repealing two clauses, the one disqualifying Roman Catholics to inherit lands—and the other subjecting them to a penalty for the open profession of their religion. Not an objection in either House was offered — so convinced were the members, of the equity of the request. The greatest part of the penal laws, as hath been well observed by an able, and ingenious lawyer, this evening, still remain, the insuperable barrier to our every just fear. From restless and intolerant spirits all the complaints come. It is nothing novel, to see an ignorant multitude yielding implicit credence, to what crafty men propose. These same Associators boast of their multitudes—and well they may, since it could be proved, that they have refused the signature of no individual, who hath been graciously pleased to offer. This is not all, the evidence is equally full to shew, that, like Cataline's friends, in ancient times, they have actually solicited, not only the lowest among the people, but also boys incapable of judging either of wrong or right. I myself this morning, called upon a reverend dissenting doctor, who assured me, that on his chiding his barber's boy, the other morning, for being late, he excused himself by saying, his master had carried him to a neighbouring ale-house

ale-house to sign the Protestant Association, which he confessed he knew nothing of.

The opener of the question was now called upon from the chair, to conclude; who, in a very sensible and pointed manner, replied to the last Speaker; and hoped, with so respectable a company as the present, no opinion would be formed, much less any determination passed, in favour of daring assertions, without the smallest shew of proofs. Notwithstanding all that had been so eloquently urged by Gentlemen on the opposite side; he saw no reason to alter his opinion. His surprise, he owned, was augmented, in hearing it asserted, that the influence which the late act gave Roman Catholics in election matters, would not be dangerous. Mr. President, I am sure, you, and this intelligent Society, must perceive a position of this kind, to be irreconcilable to common sense.

Those, who have with accuracy recapitulated the laws against Papists yet in force, cannot be ignorant, that their Priests, confiding in the late repeal, do publicly and uniformly officiate, without dreading imprisonment.

Nor was I, Sir, less struck to hear it called a wise policy to permit them to be schoolmasters. He that trains the child, bids fair to influence his future conduct; in which, owing to a multiplicity of possible chances, should the teacher fail,
it

it is ten to one, but the principles of moral rectitude, may be weakened, if not perverted.

The question being put—It was carried by a very great majority—that the Bishops, and others the Clergy, are highly culpable for denying their support and assistance, to the Protestant Association.

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 28th, 1780.

Which are the true friends of the King, the Supporters, or the Opposers of the present measures ?

THIS question was accepted by the Society, in terms somewhat different from these, but to the same import. They were altered by the President previous to the advertising, whereby it was imagined, the question became more clear and direct.

It was adopted, perhaps, for the strongest reasons, by Heraclitus, who, if we may be allowed to judge from facts, took a singular pleasure in speaking to questions, which might be deemed violently political. Whether it was, that he thought himself fully qualified to solve the most intricate points in that science—or that it gave a wider scope to the ebullitions of his own antiministerial sentiments, is not our province to determine. However the learned may decide the point, if e'er they think it worth their discussion, it is sufficient for us, to observe in our own behalf, what I trust is agreeable to the ideas of the majority of those who attended the Westminster Forum; that many of this

Gentleman's observations were so violent, and seemed to us capable of such constructions, as prompts us, first from a regard to public peace and good order, next, from a respect to propriety and our own private safety, not even to be the narrator of them.

On this occasion, he addressed the company in a style and manner peculiar to himself, partly complimenting them, and partly apologizing for the liberties he might take, for this purpose praying their indulgence. Too often to him had this indulgence been extended.—

He then gave us a tedious detail of the end—the nature—and origin of government; which it is not impossible might be entertaining to some, though we believe it contained nothing new to the generality of the audience.

The people, he observed, created government. 'Tis only of late, or in the most despicable reigns, it has been doubted—that it springs from the people. By them, for their own advantage, is a King raised to the throne. Not that he hath any *jure divino* title to that station, but merely, because they chuse to delegate authority to one individual, whom they consent to support, and to defend; on the supposition, that he watches over their rights in the manner they prescribe, and protects their property against all invasion from without, or oppression from within. Hence

the power becomes vested in the constitution, not in the person, or dignity of the King. When a Sovereign acts according to this form, as now delineated, he is revered by his subjects—his own virtue becomes the source of that respect, which is then so cheerfully paid him—and the parent of that majesty, which is connected with his character. It was well observed by a female French writer—that it is not Kings, but the pomp environing them, which we admire. In a word, a Sovereign, whose ultimate object is the happiness of his people, by every step he takes in the pursuit, both adds to the lustre of his crown, and merits, in the most perfect sense of the term, the appellation of, “The Patriot King.”

On the other hand, when the M—— acts contrary to these, and the principles of the constitution under which he governs—when he sports with the dearest and most precious privileges of the Empire—trifles with the interests of the nation at large, because they tally not with the prejudices of his education, or coincide not with his private piques and friendships—when he wantonly squanders the treasures, and sports with the lives of his subjects, to satiate the avarice of his courtiers, or gratify some unjust claim of prerogative : when he persists in measures which disgrace both the councils—the arms—the honour—and the character of the nation—nor will part

with Ministers hateful to the majority of the people, whose complicated wrongs demand them, as a just, though inadequate sacrifice to their resentment—I say, Sir, when a M— acts in this way, whether through wickedness, weakness, or bad counsellors—the shorter his r—n, the better for his people.

Such, Sir, are my ideas of a good and a bad K—: I do not say they are applicable at present: but shall, for argument's sake, speak on a supposition. Should there ever be men, who would advise a P—, at least of this country, to run contrary to the spirit of the constitution, they certainly would be inimical to his best interests; consequently the opposers, of measures adopted under that predicament, must be the best friends of the K—. Weak minds are apt to be intimidated at such a doctrine, and dread that it is going too far, especially, when they reflect it is said in scripture, “Touch not mine anointed—Obey them that are set over you”—without considering what follows—“in the Lord.” Now, who ever dreamed that a weak or wicked P— came under that description? We are bid to honour the King—’tis true—he has a title to it, so long as he is the terror of evil-doers, and the praise of them who do well. But should he practically reverse the injunction, and spurn at the remonstrances of the more vir-
tuous

tuous part of his subjects, while his favourites, could be proved to be men altogether devoid of moral rectitude, and among the worst species of evil-doers in the kingdom, then who would think of honouring him?

All these, with other such scriptural injunctions, are limited in their significations. To set this in the clearest light; let Gentlemen take the trouble to exercise their memories on the volumes of Revelation, where they will find the dethroning of bad Kings is reckoned a meritorious service; and where they will hear of honours, heaped even on the posterity of those, who were the instruments of it. Nay, one illustrious hero, went armed by divine authority, and announced his having a message from God, to the tyrant, whom he immediately stabbed to the heart. More instances might be specified, if requisite. Doth the historic page less abound in them? By no means. Harmodius and Aristogiton still live in the Poet's song, merely, because they slew the tyrant, and set Athens free. Is the fame of Brutus, who expelled the Tarquins, or even of him, who sacrificed his patron to the liberties of his country, diminished? Far from it.

Here, Sir, it may not be improper in me to vindicate, or rather explain myself relative to some expressions, which I let fall a few evenings ago,

and which I understand have publicly been much misrepresented. I was blamed then by a magistrate of the city of London, and am accused since of having talked about amputation, in an improper way.

The Society, with their usual candour, heard the explanation, as he called it, which in some respects appeared to them rather an enhancement of the offence. Nor did they fail to shew their disapprobation, by hissing him almost unanimously.

Such a circumstance never abashed him, who was always modest enough, if his audience disliked him, to impute it to their want of discernment, and not to his want of the power of either pleasing or instructing them : wherefore he went on—or to speak more justly, repeated what he had already said (nothing new with this Gentleman) affirming, whoever counsels the K— wrong, is by the constitution held an enemy to him, and inimical to his country.

The second Speaker was our ingenious Caledonian Orator ; who severely, and indeed most justly, reprimanded the first, for introducing the person of the K— into the debate, a thing prohibited in the Houses of Parliament, and ought to be here, and every where else. I confess, Mr. President, when I consider this, and compare it with the licentious manner in which
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the Gentleman who went before me, handled the subject—the hisses he so liberally received did not surprize me. Were I to wonder at all, respecting the matter, it would be that he was peaceably indulged so long. Such a Speaker—and such speeches—will never do credit to any Society, nor reflect honour on the individual, who hath brass enough to utter them.

The question concerns the Ministry alone, and supposes the King, a venerable personage, about whose best interests we are consulting. In truth, Mr. President, our lips should be sealed respecting him ; the question only asking, who are his best friends—the supporters of the present measures, who certainly are the Ministry, and their abettors ; or the staunch Independent Freeholder, with his friends, who invariably arraign, what their judgment hath never approved ? The investigation of this point takes in measures only, not pretending to decide on the qualities of the heart, or the principles of any man. The plain question, therefore, is—Have the public measures for some time past, brought honour, or infamy ? The Ministry advised them, the Opposition contended they were wrong. Let events tell which of the two have been most in the right ? We all know, Sir, the Minority advised the Sovereign not to go to war with such a vast number of his subjects, because they

thought it illegal; and what would end in nothing favourable to this Empire: and because the yoke intended to be laid on the virtuous and industrious Americans, was adjudged oppressive and unconstitutional. Notwithstanding all which, together with the difficulty, this country hath to maintain a war, with such multitudes, at such an immense distance, the unjust, and weak plans of Administration were pursued. Impartially view the result. They have terminated in the most shameful disasters, and the most irretrievable disgrace, to this once heaven-favoured, but lately, ill-fated country.

To come to a determinate position—Administration, or some person of superior influence, under whom they are contented to act, persuaded the Monarch of this, till then, a powerful and extensive empire, to go to war, with the most virtuous part of his subjects. Minority saw the precipice over which the prosperity of the nation hung; and with extended arms, endeavoured to preserve it. Upon the fairest, and most equitable grounds, they admonished, nay, entreated the leaders of public counsels to keep peace, nor, when they had rashly broke it, did they cease to implore their hastening the return of it. We have lost thirty thousand men—and fifty millions of money, in the unnatural contest: undismayed by all this, the cry of Administration is, Pursue

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it—No matter whether right or wrong, just or unjust. We have passed the Rubicon—go on with it.—Never give it up, adds every Contractor—it would be lessening the honour of Old England—by which they mean, it would vastly diminish our exorbitant profits.

Minority have proposed to take from the Crown, a number of places and pensioners, which now disgrace it, and in the end must ruin it. But Ministry will by no means yield their concurrence; seeing it might stop their career, perhaps, shake them from their very foundations—at any rate, they, from something resembling the touch of Midas, prefer that revenue to the constitutional virtue of this kingdom. I, for my part, believe, that there can be no prerogative of the Crown, but what apparently tends to promote the felicity of the people. Minority, or to speak directly in the terms of the question, the Opposers of present measures, mean to lop off in Spring, what would hurt the fruit in Autumn. Ministers, on the contrary, prefer the luxuriant blossom, nor will suffer themselves, to be overmuch perplexed about what may come afterwards. In a word, they are determined to riot to-day in their country's spoils, lest to-morrow she exist not, but under the power of another; or they, be doomed to bleed for the wrongs they have done her.

Because

Because Opposition may have sinister views, is a topic much insisted on by our opponents in debate, though it would puzzle us to tell, whether it be more weak, or more fallacious? Such an assertion absolutely means nothing, not conveying any charge, but what might with equal propriety be urged against the best cause—the every change in life whatever—or the most honest men in the world.

The subsequent Speaker thought it prudent to enquire, which of the two, Ministry or Minority, as far as we can collect, from their words, and from their actions, seem chiefly to have laboured the destruction of the equilibrium of the constitution; by which, we suppose understood, the separate privileges of, and the connexion subsisting between, King—Lords—and Commons. Were we to dare to suppose his Majesty capable of such an intention; the first investigation must necessarily be, the evidence for such a presumption. This would be an implication of his meaning to become absolute; which not appearing, to dwell hereon, is only the multiplying words without knowledge, and what is worse, without the least foundation in truth. If the King be the Father of his people, which we believe most assuredly: then those, who best defend the constitution, are his best friends. Let men of penetration and candour

dour—let the majority of the nation at large, let any, save popular demagogues, these sons of sedition—save uninformed understandings, or empty hungry patriots, judge, who best defend the just prerogatives of the Crown, and the dearest rights of the people, the Ministry or their opponents. If the champions of Administration can prove, what even I, would account no difficult task, that all our misfortunes have been owing to unforeseen accidents, then who can deny, that they have a deserved claim, to the appellation of being his best friends?

The Gentleman who spoke fourth in the debate, went in the same track, contending the supporters of the present measures, are the best friends of the King. Invariably warm, on the present occasion he adopted the mode of some lawyers, who leave the point in hand, to blacken the character of their opponents. The Oppositionists, he considered, as people of no reputation—as men of the basest views, and of the worst principles: whose pleasure consisted in the obstruction they gave to Government, and in the misfortunes which befell their country. Witness how they are charmed with any success they hear hath been gained over us, either by land or sea; and how fertile their invention is, in finding causes to diminish those gained by us, over rebels and perfidious Gauls. They are wretches,

wretches, who hang their heads at the laurels of their country. They, with a malignity peculiar to Devils, and which, for the honour of humanity, we thought had been confined to hell, rejoice at every stab given to that too mild and gracious Government, which yields such miscreants protection—ensures their property—and tolerates their licentiousness. In fine, I look upon the opposers of the present measures, to be the interested, needy partizans of faction, the sons of tumult, and the springs of treason and rebellion.

Often was this Gentleman interrupted by the hisses of the company; nor would have been suffered to go on, had not the President earnestly contended—That the Forum being a Society for free debate, the liberties granted to one side, of right pertained to the other. Some of the most violent speeches were heard against the Ministry, with the highest satisfaction, if we may judge from the applause given; consequently those on the contrary side, had indisputably a title to be heard with patience. He, at the same time, expressed his own disapprobation of so great violence on either side, and apprehended the majority thought, as well as him, that truth was easiest come at, and better enforced by cool dispassionate argumentation, than by fast epithets hastily given, and painting characters

ters under the reign of passion, and with the deep sable of party-spirit.

With these few remarks, the Society testified uncommon satisfaction—all became instantaneously calm—when the fifth Orator, who well deserves the appellation, spoke to this effect :

Mr. President, I have lately procured a place—The well-known voice of the Speaker, with his uniformity of Minority principles, occasioned a laugh ; which the President begged them to stop, not doubting, but the Gentleman might, perhaps, indulge us so far, as to inform us what sort of place it was, and by what means he procured it.

The Orator proceeded——Sir, the place I have got, is neither more nor less, than room to stand where I now am, which by every decent means in my power, I have been trying to get this evening, till the present moment, without effect. At last chance, which often succeeds better, than well-concerted schemes, threw it in my way.

One Gentleman, Sir, in this debate, hath rather confidently, than truly told us, that the part taken by the Ministry, hath been always wrong. Though, in general, I agree with that Gentleman, I must confess this is going rather too far ; nor, I fancy, will he, even in the opinion of the most staunch Minority men, be able to establish the remark. We admit it an axiom in morals,

morals, that no man can be at all times equally vicious, or invariably in the wrong : why, or on what grounds, dare we deny the reverse of the case ? The greatest fools are sometimes right. Many, therefore, as the blunders are, with which Administration stand charged, it is rather unfair to say, they have never been right. The Gentleman was not very happy in the choice of his figures, if we suppose he meant they should be auxiliar to his assertions, else why name lopping off the branches, that were too luxuriant to aid the autumnal fruit. If the tree be corrupt, strike at the root—to prune the tree, must otherwise prove of little or no avail.

In all arguments of this kind, Sir, we hear much about taxation. They ought to be taxed—I grant you, provided it was constitutionally, and, what affects us deeper, were they ours to tax—When they were, and when they calmly assented to this, our study should have been to make the yoke pleasant unto them, to induce them the longer to have continued under it : for even then it was foreseen, that one day or other, they would be independent of this country. Was it reasonable to think, that millions of people, imbued with the warmest love of liberty, and acquainted with the spirit of the English constitution, would not, in a country so fertile, so delightful, and at such an amazing distance from

from the seat of Empire, gradually discern their own strength, and on it lay the foundation of future empires. Has Asia been the cradle of nations? Has Africa?—Has Europe? Each in their turn, been the scene of powerful nations, rising and falling, hot contests maintained, and numberless vicissitudes? And is it not likely that America, in rotation, should partake of these commotions? Did the Creator of the universe intend the greatest part, for aught we know, of this world, without any of the more conspicuous demonstrations of his power, his wisdom, and his goodness?

Several hints this evening have been thrown out, concerning the executive part not having been managed as it should—for my own part, Sir, I do think when this is judiciously enquired into, it will be found the Premier is not altogether to be blamed. He certainly planned several things, exactly, as the most intelligent man could have done—but if he hath been misinformed of the nature, or strength of such places, never having been personally there, who is to blame? Or, if those, to whom the executive part was intrusted, had particular reasons for not doing their utmost, in the speediest manner to comply, let the blame rest where it ought, and punishment for a ruined cause, and from an insulted country, fall weighty on their heads
who

who are criminal. After all, this is deviating from the point before us. 'Tis not—Whether Administration have planned well, or Generals, or Admirals, executed ill :—but, Were the Ministry right as to the object in the first outseting ? If so, their opposers are the enemies to the constitution. We deny they were right in the primary object, therefore contend their opposers are the best friends of their Sovereign.

But there are still stronger arguments : this very day brings tidings, which confirm the reports of our success, against our inveterate enemies, under the command of the great—and gallant Rodney. Shall we weakly imagine the saving of 500,000 l. is not worthy the attention of Parliament, because matters of still greater consequence are before them ? Surely no !

The sixth Speaker was one of the most violent Antiministerialists ; who deviated grossly from the rule which the President but a little before had been enforcing ; namely, the merit of dropping violence on both sides of the question. He in the very first sentence, and I believe we might add, in these terms, thus expressed himself :

Mr. President,

This Ministry are the most profligate, and the most infamous of men, whether considered collectively,

lectively, or individually, who appear, only influenced by the considerations of party, or interest.

The injustice of the American war obviously struck the bulk of the nation, notwithstanding its being said, that it was supported by some of the most independent country Gentlemen. In the early stages of it, we admit it was so. Owning to what cause? Why, to this most plain one—Administration misled them. And they now execrate their own credulity, nor is it to be thought, many of them will much longer support those measures, the scope and design whereof, at the beginning, were so industriously concealed from them.

It hath further been urged, that the Opposition planned and fomented the American war. This is really attributing that to them, to which they have not the least pretensions. For a long series of years, they have entertained an antipathy to taxation in particular: besides, to several other acts of the British legislature; which might easily be quoted, were it in the least requisite. I assure you, from having spent the greatest part of my life among them, their ideas relative to liberty and property, were too refined to need a stimulus, from patriots on this side the water. The principles of genuine patriotism burned too pure in their own bosoms, to need a fanning breeze. Look, Sir, at Corsica, Had

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they Orators, or, as Ministers affect to call them, incendiaries in France? yet did not they support their liberty with equal spirit—though, alas! not with equal success? What a number of bloody battles did they fight! How innumerable the losses they sustained! and if when drove to extremities, without seeing any one Power in Europe actively befriending them, there were, perhaps, forts or strong holds which they relinquished, ought we rashly to blame them; seeing there probably were ruling internal reasons, for their conduct, of which we are disqualified to judge?

Parties, it hath been said, are united in the war against the House of Bourbon—to that, say the partizans of Administration, our success is owing. This argument will turn either way. If it is so, why then will Administration persevere in those measures whereunto they well know, the Minority can never in honour, or according to their special declarations accede?—And if it is not so, they must allow, either that the commanders have been faulty, (which arraigns their own judgment, in not chusing men of abilities at first) or results from the greater bravery of our troops, when acting against a natural foe, than a quondam brother; which doubly militates against the prosecution of the American war. The supplies, were most liberally granted in the one case, as in the other—
consequently

consequently there is no subterfuge in that quarter. Do not the Minority rejoice at the success of Rodney? the plainest proof they are not, as some chuse to depict them, enemies to the prosperity of their country.

We have also heard an exceeding strange doctrine lately broached, that it is wrong to blame commanders. What are they, in these virtuous days, become absolutely perfect? Is it impossible for them to be cowards, or inadequate to the duties of their office? When these sublime creatures transgress, are they not to suffer punishment? If deficient, are they not to be reprobated? In proportion to the greatness of the trust reposed in them, should be the exemplary nature of their punishment. While we grant it admits a doubt, whether the Ministers who plan injudiciously, are not the primary sources of the misfortune; and therefore to be dealt with accordingly?

The seventh Speaker in this evening's debate, set out with remarking, how easily we may come at the decision of the question, by pursuing the ordinary method of tracing effects to their causes. The one denotes the nature of the other. Has the conduct of Administration been upright? Hath their motive been good? Are we not intolerably taxed? What necessary of life hath escaped the Briarean grasp? 'Tis true,

several of the luxuries and pleasures of it remain unaffected, for this plain reason ; to prevent its falling on the tools of Government, or on the sons of riot and dissipation.

Respecting elections ; by the most secret yet effectual means, the precious rights of Englishmen are invaded, and our once real liberty hath either dwindled into an empty name, or is couched under the fangs, of an hitherto veiled mask of arbitrary power. In opposition to these direfully portending symptoms, what have the Minority attempted ?—They have framed judicious plans, which have been almost totally rejected, for abridging the places of profit, and cutting off enormous pensions, in order to weaken the influence of the Crown : which single circumstance, in my opinion, proves the Minority to be the best friends of the King.

The Gentleman who opened the debate, now used his privilege of concluding it. He contended, it was not improper to name the King—it was the right of an Englishman not only to name him—but to speak to him—to petition him—nay, to remonstrate with him on constitutional principles. Nor was it repugnant to the question, which in express terms asked ;—Who are the best friends of the King ? By way of depreciating characters, whose virtues and abilities they must see, but will not confess ; it
has

has been asked with an air of triumph, Who are the Opposition? With more ease, and greater pleasure, we reply, Among them, are nine Dukes, in point of fortune the greatest, besides several Earls, and even two Bishops, who on public concerns speak from conscience, and in all their determinations, act from their own feelings. As to the other House, need I mention a Savile—a Turner—with many other names, who do honour to human nature, and are the jewels of the British senate.

It was said, that they advised measures which would ruin the country. If the Minority was meant hereby, why came the assertion unsupported by any species of evidence? Apply it to the Ministry, which now do more than disgrace this country, and, oh grief of griefs! proofs, like the locusts in the land of Egypt, swarm from every quarter, that their weak, foolish, and unjust schemes have well nigh ruined this Empire. See, Sir! with what pleasure, like drowning men, they catch at every twig; and with what joy they receive success, from the tried experience, and firm gallantry of a reprobated Admiral!—

At this expression the Society could bear no longer. Almost all hissed him—with which, as usual, he was not much affected. The President, ever ready to fulfil the pleasure of the

Society, called the Speaker to order; and wondered at his delaying for a moment to alter the expression, on perceiving it offensive to so respectable a company. Stung by this, he resumed his speech;—

And said—They now rejoiced in the services of a long-neglected Admiral. Neither is it, Sir, a new question in politics, to enquire who are the firmest, or best friends of the Sovereign. Scarce a period of our history, but furnishes us with examples of this kind.

It hath likewise, by a Gentleman this evening within doors, and by multitudes without, been affirmed, that if Ministry had not endeavoured to coerce—at any rate, the Americans would in process of time have assumed independence. Was it then sound policy, to take such measures as must necessarily hasten it?

He now, according to his own mode of speaking, got warm with his subject; which climacteric of his ratiocination, the majority of the Society for the most part deemed a wandering from the point. And feebly indeed—spoke the eulogium of a Chatham, a Barre, and other names, so universally respected, that from his lips they received no sort of lustre; except, that he was a very little part of the illustrious public, who agreed in venerating them.

After

After all, continued Heraclitus, the eloquence even of a Chatham, and a Barre, have been insufficient to produce a change for the better.

Futile, indeed, is the objection, which hath been started on the absurd supposition, that the speeches on this side the water, gave birth to, and, through the various stages of this direful business, fomented the American rebellion. The floridly eloquent Mr. Burke put this matter to rights, when he told the House of Commons, the Americans were a shrewd, sensible, and sagacious people, deeply read in law—in divinity—in policy—and almost every other branch of literature. Ask those brain-suckers, the Booksellers, concerning the amazing exportation of books, relative to Government, and to civil society, previous to these unhappy disturbances, and they will assure you, that in particular, many thousands of Blackstone's Commentaries were sent thither. In a word, Sir, these sons of public virtue, and warm partizans of liberty, arose not like other nations. Ere they dreamed of acting for themselves—long before they entertained the least idea of separating from their mother country, they were, individually considered, great in Agriculture—great in Laws—great in Sciences—great in Commerce—and great in every species of industry.

On the question's being put—It was carried by a majority, so very imperceptible, that the President was twice obliged to take the sense of the Society—That the Opposers of the present measures are the true friends.

MARCH

M A R C H 6th, 1780.

Whether the Bill now depending in Parliament, for extending the Privileges of Debtors, has not the strongest tendency to encourage Fraud and Dishonesty, and in consequence, to produce effects, highly injurious, and destructive to the commercial interests of this kingdom?

WHEN this question was first read from the Chair, the President animadverted somewhat severely on its length, alledging, that a circumstance of this kind, for the most part obscured, if it did not absolutely hinder an instructive, or entertaining discussion of the point.

The question, however, chancing to relate to a matter then universally talked of, was brought forward at the pressing importunity of the Society. Between the night whereon it was announced, as the subject of the ensuing evening's debate, the Proposer himself, had been kind enough to improve the hints from the Chair, and altered the terms of it, from what they at first were, to what they now stand.

To the best of our knowledge, the Author
did

did not open it. This was done, in a most masterly manner, by a young Gentleman, said to be clerk to an eminent Attorney ; who set out with paying an exceeding handsome compliment to the Westminster Forum, for its regularity—its respect to propriety—the cast of the company—with the learned speeches so frequently there delivered. At such an awful tribunal, he might very well conceive the sentence, that might too justly fall to his lot, did not some acquaintance with its amazing candour, embolden him to hope for its indulgence ; especially, Mr. President, when I assure you, this is the first time I ever spoke in public.

The Society gave universal applause, and the Gentleman went on thus :

The Bill, Sir, alluded to, and now depending in Parliament, is, of a most alarming nature, and inimical to the fair trader. When I say this, do not think I mean the least reflection on the generous principle, which must necessarily have induced the noble Author to propose it. His character, founded on the unwearied exercise, of the purest benevolence towards his fellow-creatures ; together with each other virtue, is too exalted, to require any commendation of mine. From tenderest humanity, the sentiments doubtless originated. But as the object of the Bill regards a very abstruse point ; inter-
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woven with a multitude of others, his Lordship, will pardon me, if I conjecture the possibility of his being rather mistaken.

Few of his rank know how trade is carried on, and by what means supported. The nature of arrests, in the arguing a point like that before us, demands peculiar consideration. Former laws were reckoned insufficient—bankrupt laws were intended as an auxiliary aid—yet is there any person so ignorant, as not to know, that they are daily, and most shamefully abused, in a multiplicity of modes? which, I presume, in such a Society, would be superfluous to quote.

The expectation, Sir, of insolvent acts, fills the gaols with numbers of unprincipled men, who, averse to honest industry, after rioting on the public at large, or the credit of blinded individuals, at last elude the just demands of these, by throwing themselves into a prison, there waiting the arrival of that moment, which, without paying a farthing, enables them to look their much-insulted creditors in the face. These acts may be politic, and highly prudent in themselves, abstractly considered: yet are often ill-timed, if we closely examine the periods, at which they happen, together with the circumstances usually prognosticating them.

Another ill effect of these insolvent discharges, is, the letting loose worse than beasts of prey
up.

upon the public, who live by their skill in fraud, and their alertness in imposing, on unsuspecting integrity. Thus, it was found, that the white-washing act; as it was called, lay open to such abuses: that the Parliament met sooner than usual, in order to repeal it. As to the 32d of his late Majesty, commonly called the Lords Act, instead of an amendment, appears liker a repeal, and, when legally enquired into, amounts to pretty near an act of perpetual insolvency.

Judges are the sources whence justice ought to flow. Being the Oracles of the law, they should be the understanders of it, and are bound in the most solemn manner to administer it pure, and free from any bias, except that, relative to the unchangeable principles of right and wrong. Not a few, however, are fearful, that some late decisions of a certain Bench, are mingled with prejudice, for we are averse to suppose them swayed, by any private gratification.

But to return to the point expressly before us, a man by changing his place of abode, may defeat the possibility of a restoration to his former credit and trade. Neither is the law intended to multiply sharpers—whereas if this bill now depending is carried, the field for the exercise of their diabolical schemes, receives a prodigious enlargement. It is further urged, that
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it will make people far more cautious of giving credit—but they ought to consider, that to destroy credit, is to ruin commerce; the one cannot subsist without the other, therefore to endanger the one, is to sap the foundations of the other. The kingdom, owing to a variety of causes, at this very time swarms with penniless fellows, who, equally devoid of principle, must starve, unless they succeed, in their own spider-spun schemes of infernal injustice: who, at the same time, if the Bill passes, may, and will, live in affluence and debauchery. For the sake of the active tradesman—for the sake of the laborious peasant—for the sake of the good-natured moneyed man—for the safety of commerce at large—and even for the sake of virtue, let us hope the Bill will not pass.

As soon as this Gentleman sat down, the President occupied the interval, by observing how rejoiced he for his own part was, and how pleased every friend of the Westminster Forum, by which he meant every Gentleman, who had contributed to its attainment of the estimation, in which it now stands with the public, must be, to perceive the happy fruits, were it only in the present case, that it had prompted so sweet a speaker, and so sensible a youth, to enter the lists of oratorical fame.

So impressed were the auditors with the just-
ness

ness of the compliment, that, because it expressed their sentiments, they favoured the President with the most unanimous applause.

In thanking the former Speaker, the President had called his speech excellent: which the Counsellor, who went next in the debate, tried to ridicule, by often repeating the phrase, "excellent speech"—saying, if he could not make an excellent speech, he would make a short one, and that a short one was sometimes nothing inferior to an excellent one. "Laboro esse brevis," was one of his very learned quotations, and indeed the very way in which he pronounced it, seemed to indicate that to speak on this occasion, was no small labour to him.

Here the Society, despising the narrow soul, that could shew proofs of pining at praise deservedly paid, and which they had so fully approved, conceived his quibbling to be a species of insult to them, and, by way of letting him know this, hissed him severely.

Nothing intimidated hereby—he proceeded, Mr. President, I confess I know nothing of the Bill, save from the Gentleman who opened the question: after all he hath said, I firmly believe, it will not hurt commerce—it will rather give a security to it in general, and likewise add strength to it, particularly considered, because if the Bill is carried, it will release multitudes from
confinement.

confinement, whose manufactures and labour, are lost to the community.

The Gentleman supposes the noble Lord ignorant of the effects it might have. This is truly talking without requisite information. Had he, Sir, the honour of knowing the noble Lord, he would find him thoroughly conversant with the principles of commerce, and with those of every other ornamental, and useful science.

This Speaker set out like a great many who speak in public, better than he finished; seeing he contradicted himself, by allowing that the members of the House of Commons, who heard his Lordship speak on the subject, could not, owing to the indefinite and complex nature of the Bill, accurately comprehend, what his Lordship meant.

He succeeded better in observing, that the Gentleman threw a political, and somewhat of an ill-natured reflection on a seat in the King's Bench, which the majority of the nation, he presumed, would acknowledge had never been more respectably filled.

Bankrupt laws, Sir, were introduced in the time of Henry VIII. — they were excellent in their kind. What more equitable, or consistent with the laws of humanity, than that, after a Cessio Bonorum, bankrupts should obtain a certificate, and even have some little part dis-
counted

counted to them, to qualify them in some small measure to set up again, in order to prevent their being lost to the community: which requires to be strengthened on every occasion; but is materially injured, by whatever tends to weaken it.

The subsequent Speaker set out with a very judicious quotation from Magna Charta, illustrating the observation already offered, that credit is the soul of trade. His speech chiefly consisted of remarks upon acts of Parliament, passed at various times, relative to trade, and to tradesmen.

Here he glanced at the 12th of George the 1st.—the 1st year of his late Majesty—the 30th; extending to soldiers—to marines—equally as to sailors, in whose case liberty is secured, provided the sum be under 10*l*.

This Gentleman mentioned some very striking instances, which had come under his own cognizance. The late Act, he said, obtained by the strenuous efforts of Lord Beauchamp, destroyed in part that rascally set of attornies and balliffs, who formerly were real nuisances in society—and poisonous adders to those unfortunate individuals, who fell in their way. What but commerce brought this country to an almost unparalleled grandeur? —and nothing, save
what

what shakes its foundations, can accelerate its ruin.

The fourth Orator this evening, offered to the Society a modest introduction, and was almost sorry to oppose the ingenious Opener of the debate — in conjunction with the last Speaker ; since, in contradiction to an assertion advanced by both, he denied credit to be the soul of commerce. On the contrary, his opinion was, that credit had well nigh, if not altogether, ruined commerce.

I refer, Mr. President, to the picture given us of the noble Lord, the proposer of the Bill : whereon he observed, if the representation was just, his own good sense must have told him, what thousands have experienced, and more believed, ere his Lordship was born, viz. that a prison will never pay debts. It is, Sir, a school for villainy, where every thing improper is seen, and where all duties, whether of a sacred or social nature, are violated, with the most heinous aggravations. Suffice it, Sir,—that a man delivers up his all, whereby, 'tis probable, his tender wife, and amiable, yet helpless children, are reduced to the extreme of poverty, from opulence. Ye ruthless creditors ! what would ye more ? Is not this enough, with the loathsomeness of a jail ! What can its horrors add to this distress ? Ought not the property of the insol-

vent to content us ? Is he to be deprived of his liberty, because he could not give more than his all ? Grant, he has been misfortunate, must we also deprive him of the light of the sun, and debar him—unnatural idea—of the company of those domestic sources of hope, if not of consolation, which Providence may have given him ?

It hath been advanced—that the fear of a prison renders men more cautious, than any other motive would. I believe, Sir, just the contrary will be the consequence of the noble Lord's bill. For if once, as things now are, they should be cast into prison, and obtain the benefit of the Insolvent Act, their just creditors have nothing to urge against them, should they, in an after period, attain the easiest independence : whereas, the Bill depending, provides for the creditor's claim, so long as the debtor lives, if his ability to pay can be proved. Men, therefore, would be much more cautious on the latter, than the former plan. Besides, when we cry up our liberty to the stars, and so loudly boast of it amongst the other European nations, can we, with so little reluctance, deprive one another of it ? Retaliation has been supposed an argument for its justness—sweet as this may be, to the depravity of the human heart ; yet sure, none can be ignorant, how repugnant it is to the

the dictates of sound morality, and diametrically opposite to the genius of Christianity.

The subsequent Speaker replied, to the idea of credit's being destructive of commerce. The Bill on which we dispute, has a manifest tendency to destroy credit, at a period, when but too many causes conspire the same. It is not the time to alter laws relative to commerce, or its wonted effects, when it is at the lowest ebb; neither ought we to lessen the motives to honesty, industry, and fair dealing; at a time when it is so difficult to live tolerably decent, even by the conscientious practice of them. What individual will be equally diligent as before, when the power of obtaining the end is almost annihilated!

This is not the worst of it, Mr. President,—in the Bill itself are many glaring defects: witness its giving all to the first arrester—when, by far the most honest creditors, may thereby be entirely excluded. Surely this is a most capital defect, and will become the vehicle of the blackest fraud, and most aggravated injustice. In this case, every bad man has it in his power, when he finds his credit a going, or perhaps with his pockets full (such things have happened) to enter into stipulations, with some character congenial to his own, among his creditors; who arrests him, whereby, the two villains share the

whole, to the prejudice of all the rest ; who may be respectable men, and useful members of society. Respecting arrests in general, I mean those for debt ; notwithstanding the sanction which custom may have given them, it is my decided opinion, that they are contrary to the spirit of the constitution.

The sixth Gentleman who was pleased to favour us with his sentiments on the matter, peculiarly replied to the first Speaker, and concluded his strictures, by supposing; that he meant nothing, save a declamatory harangue, which being at least a variety, when contrasted with argument, Gentlemen might think it amusing; on which simple account, he imagined it was so relished.

Another Gentleman, this evening, hath widely mistaken the Bill ; as is evident from his apprehending the first claimant gets the whole, when he is liable to the creditors at large, if not in the first arrest, yet in every future period. Strange ! exceeding strange ! are the positions which this evening have been adduced ; viz. that no man would be held in durance vile, when the incapacity arises not from fraud, or any other unjustifiable procedure. There are, comparatively speaking, but few in prison, who are truly unfortunate ; by which we mean, the being brought there by unforeseen causes. Should a rigorous creditor

creditor imprison a man, in opposition to the warmest supplications of integrity, and the most sedulous endeavours, if thus far indulged, by degrees to pay him, need we wonder, if honesty, founded on a very quick sensibility, might afterwards refuse to comply?

The Bill about which we argue, must be of utility, and will free our laws from national disgrace. At present they appear vindictive. Judges, we know, have great things in their power—still it is our felicity that the laws are superior to them, and whatever power they may have, is much safer in their hands, than if lodged with individuals. We are mistaken, Sir, about the nature of a jail. Imagination, ever high coloured in her productions, to those without, has depicted it a scene of horror and wretchedness; whereas, multitudes within its odious walls, have found it no difficult matter, to render it a scene of ease and luxury. Quite otherwise is it with the truly unfortunate—to them, a jail is next to the abodes of despair.

A dishonest debtor sends—for it would be dreadful to say he sells—his conscience to the attorney; who, in an inferior degree, is a sort of jesuit in the affair; who will make the most of it, nor ever forsake it, while there is the least chance of making a farthing by it. On something like such ideas, Surgeons and Butchers

are debarred from juries. If we forbid the one, on account of their familiarity with blood; we ought to prohibit Attornies, from the consideration, that the distreffes of others, are their sources of gain. Creditors may afterwards relent, but the Attorney must be paid: nor doth it seldom happen, that his charge is double the first sum. Is not this a circumstance worthy of inspection, and amendment?—Ask justice!—ask the dictates of humanity!—

Consider, also, the detriment done to morals by prisons—the sense of shame wears off, and with it the principle of virtue fades. The heliotrope would expand without the chearing rays of the sun, sooner than virtue could bloom, if disrobed of the mantle of modesty: and this never had its wonted effect, after having experienced the gloom of a prison.

I perfectly agree with the last Speaker, in thinking arrests for debt, not warrantable by the spirit of the constitution. Should the abridgment of public credit ensue, from the passing of the present Bill, I am induced to hope manifold advantages will thence result to the fair dealer, and to honesty in general.

The Gentleman who spoke seventh in the debate, remarked, that for many years past, we had abundance of treatises and essays on trade, some to the purpose—more, quite wide of it—but the major part of them, wrote by speculative

tive men, unacquainted with the minutiae of business, in its complicated forms and branches. Yet, who did not fondly believe himself capable of making amendments — in the proposing whereof, each commonly runs to the extremes of the other? We do that in the iron age, which would be fit in the golden. The Bill is intended to narrow the authority of the creditor, which can have no other effect, than to render him more guarded, and inquisitive into the character of the persons with whom he deals.

The inconsistency of a man's being judge in his own cause, is evident; neither can judges, in such cases, always gain sufficient information of the matter. The bankrupt laws, all must allow to be good. There is a penalty to them. Did that exist here, it might be an adequate security. Let, Sir, as in those cases, persons be appointed to enquire minutely into the circumstances of the debtor, his character, with every other essential part of his situation, and then act accordingly.

I differ, Mr. President, from the last Speaker, about the nature of credit, which he considered as real, or fallacious. I wish he had favoured us with a definition of what he meant by fallacious credit. A man with a princely fortune will disdain trade, the end, in his case, being needless, viz. the acquisition of a fortune. Why

labour in mind and body for that, which he already possesseth?

In our prisons, are a number of artists in various branches, and of manufacturers which the State can ill spare, may be true: though, on close enquiry, I believe, we shall find more attention to credit and character, paid by people in those lines of life, than by those moving in a higher, at least apparently. The swindler—the wou'd-be gentleman—the sharper—the gamester—with others of such like classes, fill our jails. From being the plagues of society, they turn furies in a prison.

Insolvent acts, from the multiplicity of the objects they relieve, cannot be always wrong. We hope they often restore to his family—to industry—and the community, many valuable persons: while it remains a matter of fact, much to be deplored, that the late frequency of them, hath more than ever crouded these nauseous places. A fallacious credit, we grant, doth exist; but the grand query is—Will that be prevented by the Bill now depending? Much has been said, concerning the inhumanity wherewith some creditors have used their debtors. We do not pretend to deny the charge; yet are sorry the Gentlemen who bring it forward, have neglected to contrast this, with the many acts of benevolence, and the most disinterested friendship;

ship, displayed towards the unfortunate. The noble Lord's Bill, in its present state, is very far from being able to stop rigorous treatment; since, admitting the person to be more free, yet the demands of the creditor, in succeeding periods of the debtor's life, may be productive of consequences, no less destructive of his peace of mind, and the happiness of his family.

It hath been said, of the bulk of those confined for debt, that, provided they could have commanded their own, they would not have been there. This is a doubtful problem, and admits a solution equally favourable to the present mode, as to the proposed one. Allowing Lord Beauchamp's motives to be ever so good, to establish their credit, must we depreciate the characters of those very respectable citizens, and eminent merchants, who have so resolutely objected to the Bill, from a rooted persuasion, that it militates against the principles of trade in general? Forbid it, the honour of Englishmen!—forbid it, equity and common sense! Among the opposers of this Bill, are characters whom this country esteems; and whom of course his Lordship must, nay, from his own good breeding would, pay deference to. Were mankind honest, there would be less need for caution. But, we had almost said, so universal is fraud, and appearances are so easily put on, that the
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nicest discernment cannot always pierce them; and the most vigilant assiduity is often entrapped by the art wherewith the injustice is veiled. After all, men would, from motives of interest, added to the usual feelings of human nature, never keep those in prison, whom they were convinced had dealt fairly, especially on finding the confinement of their debtors is attended with some expence.

The Counsellor, who had spoke already in the debate, not much to the edification of the company, rose again. The Society, for obvious reasons, now seemed determined not to hear him. He insisted on being heard—the majority disapproved—a few cried out, hear him, hear him! He assured the President, he would only take five minutes—and reverted to his former position, that it would narrow credit; a circumstance in itself the more desirable, when we reflect, that the causes of such numerous bankruptcies, originated from the extensive nature thereof. What I insist principally upon, is, that confinement stops population, which is the strength of every State.

Here a loud laugh was heard from all corners of the room—and the brilliant group of ladies in the gallery, spread their fans before their faces,—the laugh terminated in almost as general a hiss, when the company heard the indelicate way,

way, in which the Speaker pursued the illustration. Happily for us all, he did not take his five minutes ; but perceiving the temper of his audience, was prudent enough to sit down.

He was followed by a Gentleman, who had also spoke this evening ; but rose now to refute the idea of an indiscriminate pity, which, he contended, when politically considered, had consequences, little short of the evils, flowing from an opposite principle.

I need not tell you, Mr. President, nor this respectable company, that commerce originally consisted in the simple barter of commodities—after a long chain of events, money became the sign of value. Laws, relative to exchange—to equity—and security, were formed. The imperfection of human exertions appeared here, as in every thing else—punishments were appointed—penal laws were devised ; nor do we scruple to say, they, for the most part, are too severe.

The real objects of pity, nevertheless, in, and round this great metropolis, are nothing near the number you may imagine. On this I speak from conviction, which leads me to tell the following story. I was once, Sir, employed by a Gentleman, publicly, and deservedly, known for his humanity, and particularly for his painful inspection into those matters, to distribute a sum of money to the poor prisoners.

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The extatic raptures which thrilled my bosom the preceding night, are not to be described—the wished-for morning came : I, in unfeigned pleasure, doubly felt the relief I was commissioned to give. I went from prison to prison—enquired into the circumstances and behaviour of each unhappy person, confined for debt ; yet, not more strange than true ! out of 20 l. I brought back 12 guineas, which pained me to the very heart, to find none deserving of. In a word, I take a pride to believe my countrymen are generous, while it grieves me to see how ill-directed, for the most part, their generosity is.

The tenth Speaker was a Lawyer, who spoke often at the Forum—always with uncommon ease, elegance, and knowledge of his subject : nor was ever heard but with the utmost attention. An artless, yet a commanding mode of speaking, distinguished him. He replied to our accurate student of law, the seventh in the debate, about fallacious credit. This, he said, was not the golden, but the iron-age, therefore the proper time to bring in such a Bill—the very intention whereof was solely to narrow the power of the creditor : former acts, it must be granted, are not competent for this purpose ; why then object to those which are ?

A very manly defence hath been made for
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the opposers of this Bill, founded on their affluence and rank in life. After all, it cannot be disproved, either on principles of law or logic, but that in opposing it, they actually oppose their own interest, seeing, that the future effects of the creditors are liable to debts remaining undischarged, be the period of their having been contracted, ever so remote. With regard to the expences of keeping a man in prison, he begged leave to set his learned brother right, who must know, that a man, at present at least, for some months, receives nothing, but must find his own necessaries, or die.

I congratulate a Gentleman on your right hand, Mr. President, on the joys he felt at being impowered to give away a sum of money to the unhappy wretches, confined at the lawless pleasure of unrelenting creditors: but when I heard the trifling nature of the sum, I knew not how to reconcile to myself, the difficulty he found in parting with it. Without the least wish to rob that Gentleman of one particle of his pleasure, I think I could, conscientiously to myself, and worthily as to others, distribute not only 20 but 20,000 l. in one day, in and round the city of London. I think the present Bill has a very immediate tendency, to prevent the truly unfortunate from being blended with the justly and meritoriously guilty.

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It is a sentiment, wherein I trust Britons will for ever agree, that where Justice holds the balance, Mercy should turn the scale.

The Opener of the question was now, from the chair, called upon, to conclude the debate, who modestly declined entering into any further discussion of the matter—or indeed to animadvert on any thing which had been dropped—was pleased to hear the scope of reasoning so extended; and contented himself, with assuring that very genteel audience, that he had not heard any thing to convert him from the opinion wherewith he set out.

On the question's being put, it was carried—That the Bill, now depending, for extending the privileges of debtors, had the strongest tendency to encourage fraud and dishonesty; consequently, to produce effects highly injurious to the commercial interests of this kingdom.

MARCH

M A R C H 13th, 1780.

Is it agreeable to the Constitution, that the Commissioners of Excise, should determine causes without a Jury, when their own Servants, or Excise Officers, are always Plaintiffs, and that the said Commissioners' determination is final?

ERE any question was expressly named for this evening's debate, the President received, when in the chair the former night, a note to this purpose:

Reverend Sir,

If you have no particular question for next evening's debate, several Gentlemen present wish to have the first question you proposed this evening for acceptance, to be offered next Monday.

The President, ever willing to oblige, complied; though, to his mortification, he found none of them were Speakers. Whether the opener was the author of it, I cannot say—of this, at least, we were all convinced, that he was one of the worst Speakers we ever heard attempt it in public; therefore we shall not trouble our readers with what he said.

Whatever degree of pain we felt from the first Speaker's inconsistent harangue, and mangled story, was abundantly compensated by the second Orator, who spoke to this effect :

Mr. President,

I should rather, on a point of this kind, argue on general principles, than singular incidents, or particular trials. As to the double case, for so it actually is, related by him who opened the question, —the first proved nothing, in my opinion, and the latter I totally reject.

I profess myself a friend to our glorious constitution; and reckon myself happy to live in a country, where the trial of every capital or important cause, is by the peers of the offending or accused party. What mortal but must rejoice in a circumstance of this kind? or what man can complain to undergo what his brethren —his fellow-subjects, and equals, after a candid hearing, and every reasonable liberty granted for exculpation, shall determine? I allow, Sir, were any thing contrary hereto, attempted in this country, it would then become the duty of individuals, to use their utmost efforts to frustrate the same. This privilege, 'tis to be hoped, Englishmen will never part with; but at the expence of their blood. No small grounds for our rejoicing, is —clearer ideas of law, and more per-

fect ones of justice, are now introduced : casuistry, in our systems of jurisprudence, hath lost its ground—and sophistical arguments bear no weight with our intelligent judges, and our impartial, unpacked juries.

According to the statute law of this country, there must be juries. In this point of view, we grant it unconstitutional for the Commissioners to decide without a jury. Subsequent acts have, nevertheless, deviated, though there are upwards of 30 acts confirming the great charter—all of them, surely, were intended to expedite law.

The hardship, if there be any in the case before us, cannot be great : since the Commissioners are always Gentlemen of honour, who, we are to remember, decide upon oath ; which must be an insuperable barrier to their partiality, either on one side, or the other.—

This most judicious, though young pleader, having rather widely viewed the subject, found himself obliged to make use of more technical terms than he commonly did ; and therefore here stopped in his reasoning, to make an apology, which he delivered in the gentlest manner.—

Then reverted to the point in debate, whereon he further adduced this argument ; namely, That it was done to ease the freeholders, of what must otherwise have balked their pleasures,

shires, if not destroyed their interests; seeing they would constantly be upon juries, nor could sheriffs attend to any other business, than the calling and arranging of people for these.

The question, Sir, rather improperly, calls the Excise Officers plaintiffs, whereas in fact, they are neither more nor less than informers for the Crown. When revenue was first settled, there was an absolute necessity for appointing Gentlemen to inspect the various branches of it; and to see that it was justly collected, and accounted for. Hence the origin of Commissioners; who, after all, may be removed at the pleasure of the Crown; and are amenable to the laws of their country, for the abuse of the authority lodged in their hands. I grant, Sir, it is arming, with a very extensive power, persons, whom we may reasonably suppose devoted to the Crown — but what then? The same may be said of almost all invested with power; they naturally glance to the quarter whence they received it. But this can produce no ill effects, when appeals from their decisions are competent in still higher courts of judicature. If the determination of the Commissioners was absolutely final; and they presumed to advance, much less practise it, the nation would not bear it. I think, I can answer—could not you, Mr. President?—for the virtue of the Westminster Forum:—they would oppose

oppose it. Most acts of that board are, when minutely examined, of such a complexion as to forbid our fears. A writ, a certiorari, may be obtained.

The first determination must be before the Commissioners, I grant you; still, Sir, as has been already said, may be removed. Unless these decisions were arbitrary, there is no just ground of complaint: if arbitrary, "I will resist the award," is in the power of the person, who thinks himself aggrieved, to say. This being the case, the chimaeras raised by the terms of the question, appear literally to be such—the inconveniences supposed to follow, are either of the most trifling nature, or disappear entirely: wherefore, I give it as my sincere opinion, that the usual mode of that Board's procedure, is neither contrary to the spirit of the constitution, nor to the proper distribution of justice in general.

When this Gentleman finished, there was no appearance of any other being disposed to speak; or indeed to hear, as the generality employed themselves in calling—another question—another question! To which the President replied—If none chuse to speak to this, no doubt, it would be far better to dismiss it. He confessed, that when this question was moved for, it struck him, that it would not create much argumentation. The last Gentleman had here shewn his
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acquaintance, like a lawyer's indeed, to be with every material part of our constitution : yet he hoped there might, in the room, be those of a different opinion, no less qualified to dispute the matter. If so, he intreated them to rise, and oblige the company with their sentiments.

None arose ; on which the last Speaker got up again, and said, he wished just to add a remark or two to what he had already offered, seeing such a silence reigned in the room. He happened to recollect a circumstance, consistent with his own knowledge, which he told at length, because the tendency of it went clearly to prove, that resistance to the decrees of these Commissioners, is not so dangerous, as weak or uninformed minds, wish us to believe. The case was—where an aggrieved Distiller made an appeal from their decision, and gained his cause, with ample damages, and costs of suit.

Another Gentleman now rose, who, in an animated tone of voice, assured us,

That to determine without a jury, on the property of Englishmen, was a daring attack upon the very existence of our glorious constitution. In other courts, Mr. President, there is trial by jury for every article on which they decide, and why not here ? We have been told, they are Gentlemen, men of eminence in life, and, to mend the matter, that they are bound by their oath,

oath, to determine impartially. Is this reasoning? I had almost asked, is this common sense? I know and admire the abilities of the Speaker, who adopted this mode, sed humanum est errare. Since the same reasons might overturn trial by jury in all courts whatsoever; except in those commonly called, Courts of Conscience; where real Gentlemen very rarely preside; judges, in general, being men of property, and known abilities. Are the Commissioners of Excise the only men of integrity? It is hard to say, whether the supposition is more puerile or disingenuous. However, it is right they should be Gentlemen, since the bulk of those under them, are either from the lowest or most worthless of men, consisting chiefly of persons who misbehaved, or failed in the genteeler walks of life, or of pimps and footmen, who had been necessary to the pleasures of their masters. There are very few indeed, who have had the education of Gentlemen, in the under branches of the excise.

The great Alfred, of ever memorable character, left trial by Jury as the bulwark of British freedom; and the noblest legacy a Monarch could make to posterity. And shall we, Sir, lose it, or suffer it in any one department, under any pretext whatever, to be obscured? Forbid it justice!—forbid it, the respect due to the memory of those, who in every period have bled

for sacred liberty !—forbid it, every spark of public virtue, yet remaining !—

No Gentleman chusing to speak after this, the question was put ; when,

It was carried—That it is not agreeable to the Constitution, that the Commissioners of the Excise, should determine causes without a Jury.

The President remembring, that he had received a question from the hand of an able lawyer, now brought it on.

Is not a Reformation of the Representative Body necessary, to prevent undue influence ?

AFTER reading the above, the President took the opportunity of paying a deserved compliment to the author ; acknowledged the obligations the Westminster Forum was under to him ; and humbly hoped, if he was present, the number of those might be increased. Unluckily he was not—else his politeness would not have suffered him to remain without replying.

He who opened it, set out with descanting on the word Reformation ; which he apprehended to be of very doubtful acceptation, if we collected the practices of those, in whose mouth we the ofteneft hear it. I, for my part, Mr. President, do firmly believe, it has a factious tendency, in so far as it proves a cloak for the low
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and mean views of interest, pique, or ambition. I have watched our modern patriots—tried to scan their conduct—dived into their principles, and endeavoured to learn the sources of their zeal: the result whereof hath invariably displayed, neither more nor less, than a grudge; because they themselves are out, whereby they are deprived of the loaves and fishes; and have not the gratification of distributing them to others. Should they succeed, which now and then happens, amidst the thousand vicissitudes of political revolutions, we do not perceive them a whit better, than those they may have supplanted.

Many rant away about the Constitution, who could not answer the common question, unde derivatur? To hear them dwell upon that one term, we might be tempted to believe they studied nothing else—yet, after all, are unable to tell us, when, how, or for what ends it was settled. I myself once heard, in a public company, a Gentleman displaying the most amazing facility of expression, about the Constitution—Liberty—the Privileges of Englishmen—Parliaments, with all the other darling topics of such like vociferating Orators. Nothing could stem the torrent of his talking rage, till a grave old Gentleman in a corner, asked him a question relative to Edward the third—and Henry the sixth; when it positively appeared, to the conviction

viction of all present, that he did not know which of them reigned first. He is not the only one, whose ignorance can be matched by nothing, save their impudence ; admitting it doth not always shew itself in the same line.

To come nearer to the point ; let us date the settling the Constitution, to have been at the æra of the Revolution. Notwithstanding which, we see what a multitude of changes, in capital affairs, therewith connected, took place in the reigns of George the 1st and 2d. though more especially in the reigns between that period, and the accession of the present illustrious family on the throne.

The Gentlemen on the patriotic side, warmly and confidently assert, the existence of undue influence : if which be true, who is to blame ? Themselves. Did they chuse men of integrity and of unshaken virtue, whence would the influence spring ? or if it did, it must of course decay, being able to effect nothing. It is devoutly to be wished, they were more cautious in the electing of their representatives, but if they will take a price for their voice, need we be astonished, that the giver condescends to accept a present for his own ?

I admit, there is a different bias towards the various forms of Government, in the minds of all men ; while it obviously strikes us, that in

a country governed as ours is, that bias will be exceeding apt, to run into a factious republican spirit.

The Gentleman who spoke second, replied, to what seemed to be the insinuation of the last Speaker; viz. That the House of Hanover owes the throne itself, to the operations of Court influence. He will allow that to be a good cause, the introducing so great and so good a family, to their right as Protestants. We all know the state of affairs, during the last years of Queen Ann; who is wrongly blamed, if she did not mean, to bring in the accursed family of Stuarts—if she did not, her favourites and ministers most assuredly did; and might have succeeded, had not a Somerset, and an Argyle, with other illustrious whig families, counteracted them. Look, Sir, at the rebellions in the years 1715 and 45; did Court influence support them?

The Gentleman, Mr. President, finds great fault with the people, for not sending honest men. Does he forget, that scarce one-third, on the closest calculations, are electors? who, even if they were all bad—a circumstance which neither that Gentleman, nor all of the same side of the question, can prove—can only stand against those that sent them: Why then blame the whole body of the people for the faults of

a few? With an exulting parade of words, he tells us, "Reform, is the cry of those without." With more justice, if with less declamation, we ask, Why is it not reverberated by those within? To state but one side, is next to begging the question. The House of Commons were primarily intended to maintain the rights of the people; but should they, on any future period, yield sufficient proofs of their betraying or deserting these, to what can the people have recourse, except the taking those steps, which the justice of their complaints, with the exigency of the times, shall point out?

It were a desirable object, could the inequality of representation be easily rectified.— All alterations, in great state matters, ought to be made with peculiar caution: least, while one part is amended, ten may be hurt; or the road paved for numberless evils. Does this subject to a greater number, than the inequality among the representors? Some of them are men of property, yet we all know, there are many who have seats in the House of Commons, not worth ten shillings in the world, were their just debts paid; among them are also men of virtue and integrity: there are others of the most vicious principles, and most profligate manners:— there are men of the first rate abilities; and there are those whose organs, more than their judgment, simply qualify them to say, yea, or nay. Concerning
such,

such, we hear it said, that be their private character what it may, they have rights, as men, and citizens, which we may suppose they will guard, and be eager to preserve.—The argument equally destroys the present plan of representation, since there are thousands, who have not 40 s. freehold, who, at the same time, are men of great fortune, have large commercial connections—nor would be less animated in the defence of their rights, as men, and as citizens. Some have said, that men possessed of little money, are easier bribed. Is not this at the best, a very precarious assertion? since others, with equal right, will affirm, that there is more honesty to be met with among the poor, than among the more opulent ranks of men.

To him, the third Speaker replied, in the first place, to his idea of the primary intention of Parliaments being to defend the rights of the people, in opposition to the rights of the Crown. Might it not be supposed, that at the institution of Parliaments, these two were in a state of perfect harmony, and quite unsuspecting of encroaching the one upon the other? The putting them at variance, not much to the praise of those who did it, hath been the effect of party and prejudice in latter times. To apprehend these rights are inimical also to each other, is a gross mistake. Where both are acknowledged, their dependance is mutual.

We have heard much about there being only one-third, who have a vote in the election of members of Parliament. When men, Mr. President, enter into society, they part with some natural advantages, for others of a far superior nature, to be received. Our propensity to society, is so characteristical of our nature, that since the time of Timon of Athens, there hath not existed a complete man-hater. Why, after all, doth it happen, that not above one-third have a vote? save, that not above that number can find leisure for it. The avocations of life are so many, that time is entirely taken up in providing for the wants thereof. In the busy scenes, and amidst the bustle surrounding the generality, it would open a door for idleness, and be a temptation to vice; the more therefore things of that kind, are kept out of their reach, the better. The other two-thirds, if politically considered, must be divided into so many various proportions, and ranks, that on arranging them, we shall rather be surprized, how so many really have votes; and if corruption has got such a head amongst them, I think, it fairly follows, that they require more to be abridged, than enlarged. We, Sir, have received wond'rous intelligence this evening; consisting in this, that men have dearer interests than property! Should we examine this point, according to the rules philosophy affords us, the contrary, I presume, would be evident.

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The Gentleman, who opened the debate, replied again, imagining that he had but little to say, his opponent and he, being for the most part agreed. No doubt representation was carried on different ways ; both as to the mode of chusing, and the characters of the members.

The second Speaker, finding no new one arose, kindly helped to fill up the chasm, by rising once more, to observe, that Kings were apt to love power : which rendered it exceeding proper, that something should be appointed to balance this. What so proper as a Parliament ? and wherein did the dignity of this consist, more than in the sacred rights of elections ? Nor do I perceive the least difficulty in giving the congregate body of the people, the right of having a voice in constituting a representative, each according to the district wherein he lives, and the quota represented.

I also rather differ from the Gentleman, who particularly adverted to the two-thirds, whom he concluded too much engrossed by other concerns, to have leisure to attend the affair. They are almost all poor. Many have large copyholds, which at present, will not avail—others have fortunes in the stocks—others again, are rich tradesmen ; who are, nevertheless, excluded from the least part in consulting, concerning the objects of the third branch of our legislature.

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The fourth Speaker replied to the first ; who had really gone the length, indirectly, to aver, the necessity of Court influence in the management of public concerns. Abominable tenet ! —detestable doctrine—let it never be received where liberty presides ; and let the sentiment for ever be reprobated, where Englishmen are present ! Influence and prerogative can be compared to nothing, more justly than to a lion, and a serpent. Prerogative, like a lion, boldly and openly attacks us : whereas, Influence, like the other despicable animal, creeps along, nor wishes to be seen, till it mortally wounds us.

This argument having been briskly supported, and the hours of debate being ended, it stood adjourned till

M A R C H 20th, 1780.

THE Gentleman who was the author of the question, now attended, and set out with a pretty acknowledgment to the President, and to the Society, for the adjournment of the question.

It is true, Sir, said he, I gave it into your hands, begging you to propose it ; because I thought it a point of great consequence ; and because, poor as my abilities are—which nevertheless, derive some degree of importance, from the approbation wherewith this respectable company

company hath honoured them—I was resolved to enter into the disquisition, at least, hoping to excite others to speak more adequate to the point.

If there actually exists an evil endangering the community, it must certainly be Undue Influence, from the secret and slow manner in which it proceeds. Open violence is not so bad, because, where danger is seen, it may be guarded against, if not wholly repelled. A reformation is necessary in the representative body, from the very effects that have followed its deliberations and measures, for some time past.

When this debate commenced last evening, it was—and in other public assemblies, I understand, it hath been—advanced, that undue influence exists only in idea, not in fact. Let the arguments for such an opinion, be ever so specious, and the reasoning of the most ingenious nature; what signifies it, when the existence of the contrary is felt by thousands, and must strike every observer? None can deny, that vigilance over public concerns, is the duty of every subject, much more of the community, or managers of it, collectively or respectively considered. If, therefore, the original grand principles of our free form of government have been impaired, no true Englishman, but will thank the discoverer, and lend his helping hand to the repair.

The

The term in our Question, Sir, is of great extent; not limited to bribery or corruption, but to whatever militates against equity and justice. We have now septennial instead of annual Parliaments, which, when constitutionally considered, must assuredly prove an influence against the constitution, and natural rights of the people.—Here, this well-read Lawyer, alluded to his opinion about the intrigues of the Cabinet, in a former debate.—These, he contended, are reciprocal causes, mutually produced and producing. Some Speakers have, it seems, laid much stress on there being no particulars of undue influence condescended on. It is easier far, to prove things sometimes in the gross, than to establish particulars: after all, our antagonists have no room to triumph, if particulars are so peremptorily demanded, though legally foreign to the proof, it is no difficult task to give them.

The corrupted and the corruptor have not, we may be sure, joined in bringing these things to light, for this plain reason; that it would be contrary to their interest. So often as I have heard Gentlemen argue in favour of influence being necessary, they have, in general, supported their opinion, by denying the existence of it in the grossest sense. I join them in thinking it doth not, while I cannot assent to the implication of the former part, namely, the

the non-existence of it in any degree or shape; being, on the contrary, most firmly persuaded, that such hold hath it got of the vital strings of our liberty, that if not speedily disengaged, they must break, and the kingdom be involved in the most abject misery.

A war hath been carried on against our Brethren, in violation of every right and law. The contemptible inefficiency of every part of the management of it, shews by what wrong heads it hath been devised, and by what means it hath received its support. In each separate line of it, we, as a nation, wear a most ridiculous character. When justice hath been violated with impunity abroad, shall we say it originates entirely from an unjust influence at home?—Most indisputably—when to that we add, the recollection of the avowed denial of the people's right; or, which amounts to the same thing, the refusing to comply with it, to call to an account those whom they apprehend to have grossly mismanaged their affairs, even thus expressing their crime by the gentlest name.

The impious and accursed doctrine of the omnipotence of Parliament, so industriously propagated and supported by those whom it would concern vastly if it were so, and who can never enjoy mental peace if it is not so, I trust, among Englishmen, will never be countenanced, save by the lowest tools of Administration. When undue influence either exists, or is likely

to exist, we ought minutely to examine the representative body ; because, should the malady rest there, as is most probable, the severest consequences may follow. And besides, another reason for our looking closely to this matter, is, that at present we are unequally and partially represented. Oh, indignant submission !—shame to freemen ! —especially to Englishmen ! —Can you tamely bear about 6000 people to chuse the majority of your Representatives ?

The Gentleman who spoke second, appeared rather unused to such places as the Forum, nor gave the smallest signs of being acquainted with the subject. What he did say, we confess, was not far amiss ; consequently, we are bound more to applaud his prudence than his judgment. He granted a Reformation to be very requisite ; imagined all ranks and professions of men to stand in need of it ; wherefore he advised every man to begin the glorious work, by the reformation of himself.

He who spoke next, wondered none arose to defend old usages and customs. Shall antiquity, which meets with respect from almost all men, and on so many accounts, fall of it here alone ? Foreigners, moved by wonder, love, and praise, have wrote volumes on the present form of our constitution, which, as far as the policy under which they live, permits, they have celebrated as the most perfect in the world : yet, without any
very

very visible alteration, or any general shock, is lately become so rotten, if we take the words of modern patriots — and what man in his senses would presume to call it in question? — as to produce all our national woes and calamities. Take this either literally or ironically, it matters not to me, who, in spite of all they can say who oppose the above remark, can honestly declare, the defence of the present British Parliament shall never be my task; at the same time, dare affirm, though no general shock may have been felt, and no visible alteration may have taken place, there hath been an alteration much to the worse, and a shock given, which, like the velocity of the earth's motion, is certain, though many are insensible of it.

Our constitution, as it now stands, is a patched one, and hath been compacted at various times. Our Fore-fathers added room to room, instead of planning and executing under any one design, a regular piece of building. At the period of the Revolution, indeed, our ancestors should have proceeded after the manner of skillful architects: first considered the ground, — the prospect, — the hazard, — and the advantages: — then settled their design, and finished it accordingly. But alas! Mr. President, they were in too much haste: — no doubt they did a great deal, provided we call to view the manifold obstructions which lay in their way. What

a pity they had not plucked up courage, and gone some steps farther, it would have added honour to them, and saved us much regret, and public disgrace.

Admitting the Boroughs once were considerable in the scale of national importance, it must be granted, now they are not. Why then allow them to possess, in their degenerate and diminished state, the same political weight which they bore in their days of affluence and commerce? —Because Rome was once *Domina Rerum*, shall or will the nations of the earth bend to her now?

Another matter loudly calling for amendment, is, the characters of those who compose the House of Commons. Just now, above 100 of the sons of Noblemen, or their nephews, have seats there. Are these, Sir, the Representatives of the people? By no means. What is more, few people have power, without turning it to their own emolument. This depends not altogether upon situation, or rank in life; but extends from the Minister to the managing Aldermen; and from the Alderman to the cobbler. It is laudable to search out the source of this; as for the pressure, or in other words, the action and re-action, it goes first one way, then the reverse. The Minister, or corruptor, pays the elector, for the dishonest will be paid: the young, needy, dissipated Nobleman, having got
such

such or such a Place at Court—in the army — in the customs — at this board, or that board—at home or abroad, depending on the Minister, thinks chiefly about securing the same, the surest mode of effecting which, he quickly perceives, is, to vote invariably with him, no matter whether right or wrong; whether in consonance with their own sentiments formerly given, or not. In the present Sessions of Parliament, there are above 120 of this kind, at the Premier's devotion.

The fourth Speaker in this evening's debate, was the ingenious Lawyer, who uniformly defended Ministry.

I affirm, Mr. President, that I speak from motives dictated by the purest patriotism. We have been told of the volumes wrote by foreigners, in praise of our most excellent constitution. With pleasure have I perused many of them; yet cannot avoid flattering myself, with the firm persuasion, these are nothing, when compared with those pleasing sensations, and that genuine gratitude, which the hearts of the majority of those, having the felicity to live under it, do every hour of their lives most cheerfully pay.

One Gentleman hath, in a vein of irony, which he managed so uncouthly, as left us really at a loss to guess at what side he pointed it,

sarcastically asked, who will stand up to defend the British Parliament? — Let him stop his triumph; thousands will, nay, there is a man in the Forum, who will stand up to defend it — and I am he. The same Gentleman called it a piece of patched work. Be that as it may — he who spoke about mending it, I am afraid, would spoil it. But why call it patched work? for I deny the justness of the phrase, on the same grounds that a taylor would deny a suit of new cloaths to be so, though he would readily grant they were not all made at once, but progressively, the one piece after the other.

He also found fault with the idea taken from architecture, not apprehending the cases to be in any shape analogous. Thus far, Sir, for the Constitution.

The first very able Speaker, Sir, widely decanted on rotten Boroughs and Mal-representation, both which he wished to be remedied, and yet, from the picture he drew of them, would have us judge them to be desperate. Is there not something apparently contradictory in this mode of reasoning? This is not unlike the unskilful apothecary, who, conscious he was unable to do any good, was honest enough to guard against doing harm, — therefore mixed powder of pop and aqua fontana, as his general elixir! — If Britons are so degenerate as to be bought,

bought, no power upon earth can bring about a reformation. Public virtue must resume her seat in the hearts of the people, ere the attachment to our country will run in the proper channel. If the Boroughs, disdaining a bribe, would return uncorrupted men—even the treasury could not purchase them.

Fault, Sir, hath also been found with young Noblemen supporting the character of representatives of the people, — but for what reason I cannot discern. At the same time they do this, they are totally unconnected with the affairs of the other house; many of them stand not the least chance of ever having a seat there, from family interest; wherefore their senatorial dignity rests entirely on the figure they make in the House of Commons. What astonished me most, was to hear them reprobated, because they were poor — from which it was inferred, therefore they are corrupt. Good God! What sort of reasoning is this? One would think we were talking of the most mercenary German Princes, or that we had never read the Roman page, where we must have learned, that poverty stamped no disgrace; else, who would have thought of going to the plough, to fetch a consul? These nobles are of ourselves, whose interests are intermingled with ours, and who must feel the burdens they impose. This ob-

servation we cannot omit; namely, that in accusing the represented, and in painting their depravity, they are, in fact, censuring human nature.

The next Speaker said; — I also, Sir, stand up for the good old constitution, which I admire as much as the most learned in this company, yet on different grounds from some who have praised it — though, when we come to an explanation, I flatter myself with appearing an equally good and staunch Patriot, with the ingenious Gentleman whom I allude to. Politicians pretty generally allow, that laws should not precede necessity; partly owing to which, I believe, a perfect code of legislature was never at once hit upon, by any law-giver or any community. According as exigencies required, they enacted, and put into execution. What one statute did not define, another explained, and perhaps a third limited. This very circumstance, ultimately became a benefit to the people, while it was no disparagement to their system of laws.

The British Constitution, owing to a great disparity of events and singularity of occasions, was reared at various periods; still, what signifies that, so long as we find it quickly reached perfection, as nearly as possible? There hath been a period in our history, when it might have

have been urged, enough was done; our religion — our liberty, and our property demanded no more. Since then, spreading thistles have reared their heads, and from trees once well pruned, wild excrescences have been shooting forth, and gathering strength. We all know when a tree hath reached, not only maturity, but likewise beauty and gracefulness, both in foliage and fruit, without after dressings it will grow luxuriant, then irregular — at last decay. We wish, therefore, Sir, to lop off all luxuriant and cumbersome branches, in order to continue the strength and beauty, of the tree, of our glorious Constitution.

There are Gentlemen so prepossessed in favour of present men and measures, that they will not even deign to hear what their opponents have to advance. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, we must assure them, it is a fact universally felt, that undue influence robs the great body of the people of their political rights, by the smooth medium of bribing their wants and passions. I am not ignorant of what Socrates, the prince of Philosophers, used say — The people might be corrupt — they might avoid it. — By appealing to the general experience of mankind, we shall perceive the controvertible nature of the tenet. When a man goes, Sir, with the go-

vernment



vernment purse to the huts of poverty, wholly unsheltered from the insolence of wealth, and the cups of adversity; there are a thousand chances to one for his succeeding.

Permit me further to reprobate the idea of the Gentleman's apothecary; and if there be any meaning in the figure, which our blindness prevents us from seeing, to deny its application to those, who sincerely wish a reform.

Indeed, Sir, the Gentleman has come forward this evening, quite an empiric in politics. If the members of the representative body went down to the respective Boroughs without the influence of the Crown, then it might be discerned, and not till then, what virtue yet remains in the bulk of Englishmen. I confess, I see not the least impropriety in the sons of Peers sitting in the House, seeing their own interest is at stake. It is not with us as in Scotland; where they have peers that never possessed an acre of land — and where the majority are proprietors of but few; the sons of English peers, for the most part, are the descendants of those, not more distinguished for the nobility of their family, than the extent of their estates. There are many Scotch Noblemen who have not a 1,000 l. a year, even among those called wealthy; and several who have been obliged to marry the daughters of the very
dregs

dregs of the people, merely from the consideration of their fortunes.

The sixth Speaker thus addressed us,

Mr. President,

May we never forget, that nothing can be both cause and effect: in opposition to which established axiom in Philosophy, we have heard it this evening asserted, that it is the Treasury bag which corrupts the people; and at the same time, that if the Boroughs were at pains to return men of integrity, the Treasury could not purchase them. *Davus sum non Œdipus*. Reconcile this, who can!

Besides, Sir, a reformation at this time may be dangerous. All alterations in states and in state affairs, are exceeding hazardous, especially under certain predicaments, and at particular æras. The days of peace and prosperity are best suited to experiments; since on supposition of their failing, they can be easier borne; whereas the times of internal discontent, and complicated foreign war, must ever be inimical thereto. We may safely in health venture that, which in sickness would bring death. To make the least incision now, I should deem vastly perilous.

Let us seriously consider who we are now contending with, the most powerful Princes
upon

upon earth. Applicable hereto, I beg leave to quote an axiom of the first Speaker's, now in print, copied by him from Locke; viz. the definition of politics, That it is common sense applied to state affairs. May we be allowed to differ from two such respectable authorities, and to suppose, that the essentials of policy are a science too abstruse, in many particulars, for ordinary understandings to scale; whence I again infer, the greater caution ought to be used in attempting the least alterations, though even veiled with the state pretext of amendments. It has been said, there is a number ready to vote away our liberties. Is it decent, — is it candid, to say so in this assembly? The majesty of the people so loudly descanted and dwelt upon, is a flattering idea, big with the most disastrous effects, and invariably dangerous in its own nature. The people, Sir, never governed, properly speaking, in any country — it cannot absolutely be: 'tis the few who do it. We, for our part, want nothing so much as an unclouded eye, to discern our felicity, and contentment in the fruition of it. In a word — a Minister comes first from the Crown — he may be opposed by the people — and justice had, concerning him, from the Crown. The King then, in this pregression, is the last, whom we can the safest trust — therefore I argue, we are in
our

our liberties secure ; and that there actually is no more undue influence at this time, than at any preceding period.

He was followed in the debate by a Gentleman, who found fault with the mode of building, proposed by an ingenious Speaker this evening. Building, if I may presume to hazard my opinion, should first be adapted to convenience, to beauty and propriety next, and to magnificence and splendor afterwards. For instance, could any thing be more absurd than, in order to accommodate an Alderman, who complained he was starving, to bid him be quiet, the bed-chamber should be finished directly ? — or when, after a plentiful meal, he wanted to indulge repose, desire him to have patience, the kitchen should be built as fast as possible ? Physically considered, his powder of wood, and aqua fontana, were no less heterogeneous to the point in the consideration of the society. Most cordially, however, do I join others in wishing, the Minister was equally innocent as to political prescriptions, nor ever administered more dangerous medicines than the above. These are simples, whereas those of the Premier are of a baser compound, perfectly destroying the virtuous constitution, even of those who presume to tamper with them.

The noted candour of the Gentleman, who
appre-

apprehended no great danger likely to ensue from the sons of Peers sitting in the House of Commons, will excuse my differing in opinion. In the first place, I judge an elder son, an improper person, from the inclination he may have to pass matters transitorily, in order to add the greater consequence to the House of Lords, where some time or other he may have a seat. Neither is a younger son proper, being frequently less qualified to act from his own judgment, and much more under paternal influence.

In reforming, we ought to begin with the higher ranks, because they set examples to us, who move in lower. The last Speaker conceives, that liberty yet remains—suppose it does—long may it do so—Shall we on that account be the less anxious in removing that, which we fear in time may destroy it, especially when we can already specify many indications of such a tendency? Rights have been assaulted, and privileges invaded, in former periods of our history. They may be so again; therefore, so soon as the usual symptoms of the disease appear, let us apply the antidotes.

The friend of Administration replied again; in a few sentences, intended to shew that Reformation and Salvation, however closely connected in morals, in politics, were by no means synonymous terms.

The Gentleman who spoke fifth, now again affirmed, that he had been much misunderstood, as to the emblem of the tree, which he had introduced into this debate. He minutely dissected the idea of the State's resembling a ship in a high wind.—Because it blows rather fresh, the sailors must not stir, for fear of endangering the ship. What nonsense ! Yet no better is it to say, Because our national affairs are in a most miserable situation, for fear of making them worse, we ought not to try to make them better. Though Parliaments vote millions, and thousands squander it in the most infamous manner—'tis a trifle—'tis nothing !!!

The seventh Speaker this evening, replied to our accurate Student, about the sons of Peers. He declared his respect for superior rank, provided it was attended with a cast of principles and behaviour suited thereto. Nor would he be backward to confess, that this very period, so much complained of, there might be named not only many Peers, but what is more, several sons of Peers, whose literature did them still greater honour, than their exalted rank. But who would say—this alone qualified them to be representatives of the people ? Without the smallest reflection on the character of such, there were abundance of other reasons, to prove them improper persons. As to those of them, who are idle, gambling, dissipated fellows, abandoned
to

to every baser pursuit, they are unworthy of our conversation ; just in the same proportion, as they disgrace human nature.

Here our Orator introduced the conduct of Solon, Numa, with other celebrated lawgivers of antiquity, to corroborate his side of the question.

The worthy Counsellor who had opened the debate, at this instant rose to conclude it ; and in a very masterly manner, vindicated himself, from the imputation of maintaining paradoxes. It must after all, Mr. President, be acknowledged, that a corrupt Administration diffuses corruption over the representative body. We are desir'd to mend each one ourselves—thankfully do we receive the advice—nay more, we mean to practise it ; and I am sure, one of the first effects thereof, must be, that we strive to mend one another. He, in whose bosom reformation hath begun, cannot easily rest, till it also warms the breast of his neighbour. It hath been argued—Shall men go and tell these people, By your venality, I am grown great and powerful ? No surely. But we would have the people tell them, by way of bringing on, or promoting their reformation, 'Tis true ; we have been wrong in the electing of you—perhaps, we were bought ; in other words, we were base enough to sell—now we are sorry for our crime—sensible

—sensible of our guilt, and by way of shewing the sincerity of our repentance, will no longer support you, unless you change your measures, and alter the whole plan of your behaviour: allusions from the practice of physicians—apothecaries—and what not—will throw little light on the subject. Such gentry shall not treat me, as if I were mad.

I own, I did not expect any little publication of mine, would be honoured with an advertisement here: permit me however, to defend the definition, which hath been arraigned, no matter where I got it. I still assert, the people are judges of politics. Is there any thing more precious than freedom? And in England, shall a time ever come, when they are truly so wretched, as not to dare to call their representatives to account? Can there be partizans of theirs, whose sight is so impaired by gold dust, or dazzled by the blaze of future honours, in the presence of dispassionate men, to deny, that the representative body hath not gone enormous lengths, in the use of undue influence, terminating, if not stopped, in the fatal gulph of absolute power? The Gentlemen are wrong, who conceived I said punishment was necessary—I said reformation was requisite; nor did I then dream, an advocate against the idea would stand up. Neither did I mean to annihilate the rights of the voters of

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boroughs—nothing unjust would I wish to see done. Let these be added to the large towns and counties, whereby their individual rights will be preserved, and representation become more equitable than at present. The difficulty attending this enterprize, need not affright us ; provided we reflect, that in the reign of Henry the 6th — a weak and dishonourable reign—a great body were disfranchised of their rights to election.

The question being put, it was carried, That a Reformation of the Representative Body is necessary, to prevent undue Influence.

MARCH

M A R C H 27th, 1780.

Would, or would not, the depriving the petty Boroughs of the liberty of sending Members to Parliament, and adding their quotas to the counties and cities, be likely to remove the evils attending an influenced election.

NONE can imagine every evening's entertainment, at places like the Forum, to be equal. Without the least disparagement to others, I believe the opinion of the public will authorize us to say, few happened with us, save what merited the attention of the studious. The Gentlemen who favoured us with their sentiments, for the most part attended, and such were their abilities, that by doing justice to their subjects, they gained honour to themselves.

Though the purport of the above question, at this period, engrossed public conversation; it nevertheless failed in producing the effects, which might have been imagined.

It was adopted by a Stranger, who told us— This was his first attempt to speak in public; wherefore, he craved the indulgence of that Society, so celebrated for its candour,

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Mr.

Mr. President,

I hope the right of the people to meet, and deliberate on their own important interests, whether with a view to praise, or consult the means of punishing, those to whom they may have intrusted them, is a right, of which Britons will never allow themselves to be deprived.

When Egbert became the first Sovereign of England, having united, or subdued to his sway, the Saxon Heptarchy, it was found necessary to send men of experience, and approved abilities, with a view to represent the case of the distant parts of the Empire, and to watch over the common weal. When Monarchs themselves, dared to encroach on the liberties of the people, these representatives, being then virtuous men, never failed to display equal obstinacy in the defence. Thus the Barons brought the usurping, yet dastardly King John to his senses.

The boroughs now called petty, I believe, on examining our history, will be found to have been formerly great. In all countries, villages are the alpha and omega of cities. These, like states or individuals, have their infancy, their strength, their fall. A greater difficulty attends unfolding the causes, owing to which they have become despicable. I confess, my own inability to attempt the work, with the least prospect of giving satisfaction, either to you,

Sir,

Sir, or myself : while it is a palpable truth, that to such a pitch of venality are they now come, as to have well nigh ruined the glorious fabric of the British constitution. They are bought and sold at the nod of the Minister ; nay, so glaring are frequently the terms of sale, that there are men who boast of the character of Borough-jobbers. These rotten Boroughs send 300 members to the House—an evident majority—yet the voters, 'tis allowed on all hands, do not exceed 6000. Intolerable insult on the privileges of Britons !

The second Speaker, thought it was now high time to spread a plaister for the malady, unless we thought it desperate. He lamented the carelessness shewn, in the election of proper men to so great a trust. How cautious were the Athenians in particular, and the Grecians in general, ere they elected an individual to a place in the public courts, or councils. None but the experienced and wise were admitted into the Roman senate : while virtue and integrity lived un sullied among them. Nor into a British Parliament, could any, save Gentlemen of well known and tried principles, find admittance, till we lost the substance, by adhering to the shadow ; contenting ourselves with the name, instead of the reality. The evil had widely spread, before we thought of exploring the cause. Far more

respectable was the Parliament of England, when cities or boroughs assisted with money, if they did not altogether maintain, their members, than now, when their representatives are able to buy them.

I will maintain, Sir, a Member of Parliament ought to be a man of education, and of knowledge; particularly in what regards the commercial, and political interests of the country. He should be an adept in the science of Government; and have closely studied the various forms thereof, which have reached our times; especially those now subsisting, with which we may have national connections; and above all, that form, under which it is our felicity to live. Good God! what a toil there would be to the Speaker, to issue writs for new elections, were none, save men of the above description, allowed to keep their seats! It would very nearly resemble a general election.

A great writer estimates the inhabitants of Britain and Wales, to be five millions; and how comparatively few are the number of the electors! It hath been urged, that the bulk of the people have not capacities to elect. How do they know that? Or, who can pretend to say, that they who do vote, are a whit better qualified than those who do not? Witness the Cornish boroughs, besides pot-walloppers, — where a
number

number of circumstances, many of them of the most trifling nature, give a right. He mentioned a Borough within his own knowledge, where 17 indigent people chuse the representatives; about whom they only enquired, whether they were rich or poor; since, in the alternative of the question, they were most deeply interested.

In a word; if an equal representation took place, virtuous people having some chance of success, might oppose whatever propositions, contrary to the constitution, the Minister should make.

The Gentleman who spoke next, disliked the terms of the question; which, he contended, did not convey any adequate idea of the case before us.—He did not favour us with the least amendment; probably proceeding from his love of order.

He did not coincide with the last Speaker, in his remarks about the necessity of electing only men of education. I aver, Mr. President, that literature stands as highly revered by me, as by that Gentleman: sincerely do I wish, men of science were rewarded equal to their merit: nor would it give a purer pleasure to any breast than mine, did I find the majority of our senate such. I claim the right of asking him—and let him or any one present, answer—Is the British Parliament now void of such men?—So much the reverse, that some of the greatest, and most

learned characters in the kingdom, have seats in one or other of the Houses.

The jostle of the Minister has, doubtless, occasioned much complicated mischief to the concerns of liberty. For what else, save the decay of trade, hath added the weight of the city of London, to the opposition? Suppose, however, elections are influenced—in my opinion, it cannot be totally remedied; since, if stopped one way, it must operate another. Entirely agreeing with the maxim of Sir Robert Walpole—that every man has his price—I think it most adviseable, for the common concern, to let things of this nature remain as they are.

The fourth Speaker, with his usual humour, said, He most cordially joined in the wish, that every man had a vote—nay, that women might have one too, provided, they were married, whereas, if old maids, they should be taxed, and obliged to bear a double burden of the affairs of state.

With respect to Boroughs, Sir, they are so venal, that to describe particulars, is only telling every body what they already sufficiently know. Pot-wallopping Boroughs there are, and can any man in his senses, deny them to be a disgrace to the community? Such Boroughs send representatives to Parliament, while several large towns, consisting of thousands of inhabitants, with other places

places of great opulence, enjoy not the privilege? The Borough of Old Sarum, is forced to erect a booth for the election, there not being in it, a decent place to contain the candidates, and the five voters. What a shame, such a place should have the right of sending two out of the 513 members, which number sit for England and Wales! Sheffield, Brimingham, and other places of great trade, crouded with people, and busy in every art, send none!

He owned his surprize, at the last Speaker's thinking it necessary there should be an influence. For his part, he really thought there should be none. The ignorance of Cornish-men, he had heard, was wondrously great—but, if any thing better than idiots, they must feel the weight of taxes; unless these boors, owing to the abject situation wherein they had been hitherto held, should have really lost the ordinary feelings of human nature.

Soon may the Phœnix of our once glorious constitution, arise from the ashes of impolitic measures!

But, Sir, we are told, these Boroughs were formerly places of consequence, which are now become so despicable:—it may be so; still it must have looked better, if proofs had been subjoined. Admitting they had — what then? Doth any country we ever heard of, as to its towns and villages, continue invariable? No.

Wherefore,

Wherefore, since time, with other casual circumstances, hath altered the importance of places, a change in the mode of election ought to have succeeded, in order to preserve both propriety and justice.

We have been told, If Parliaments were annual, a deal of confusion would ensue. In opposition to which, I am confidently of opinion, no more would follow, than does on St. Thomas's-day, for the election of common-councilmen; which passes in so great obscurity, that few think any thing about it, and fewer still hear of it.

The Gentleman who followed him, immediately after his addressing the President, declared, this kingdom was partially represented. To whom are the people to look up for redress of so heinous an injury, but to their representatives? who, as they apprehend, had been deputed to the place where they sat, in order to protect them against the undue influence of the Crown.

Boroughs, Sir, should be active officers, in order to effect a general reform. There are, in the gross, about 114,000 electors; what a number must be in Cornwall, superior to the other parts of the kingdom, when it sends forty-four members!

The next Speaker was rather ludicrous than witty; notwithstanding his attempting the last, by reverting to the idea concerning the ladies:
and

and in fact, if he said any thing to the purpose, which we judge he did not, it was a double entendre, which men of sense will always reprobate.

He again was followed by a Gentleman, who beautifully, and severely checked the vein of abominable ribaldry, introduced especially by the last Speaker; which, he declared, he was vexed to perceive in the least countenanced by so genteel company; the major part of whom, he hoped, detested it; though, in the mean time, they might not be aware, that to laugh at it, was in some measure to promote it.—This directly reduced the noise, and established order.

He then directed his attention to the question; whereon he observed, how easy it was to multiply and to disclaim on the existence of political evils. People may be found, to whom mere assertions appear equally weighty, and stand in the place of proofs. If there is undue influence—that is, if those on the other side the question, cannot disprove the fact—then we are immediately told to be easy, for it is necessary.

If there is a midnight-bill to be carried—and who, acquainted with recent instances, dare deny the Minister hath many such?—it could not pass without influence, and that of a powerful kind. The foundation of our complaints, is not so much the thing itself, as the sources of
it,

it, with the ends to which it is directed. It is not its existence we arraign, but the cause : we wish it to arise from virtue and popularity ; not from cabinet councils, or from the treasury. Whence originated the influence, tearing men from every tender and domestic tie, to send them to America ; when those so sent, scrupled not to proclaim, that, in their opinion, the cause was inglorious and unjust ?

Mr. President, least these fair one's alluded to, conclude me to be a rude, or ill-bred man, if I pass them unnoticed ; I declare, the inference drawn, not to be a just one, seeing we were haranguing about the securing of our property, and the preserving of our liberty : whereas, respecting the females, we all know it is this very circumstance which often so deeply distresses them ; and the speedier they get rid, both of their liberty and property, they invariably are the better pleased. Nay, there are many of the privileges, to which the sex are entitled, denied them, till they have positively and legally parted with the above. What charmer, Sir, in those galleries on each side of you, would not chearfully resign them, by the first dawn of to-morrow's sun, did she approve of the receiver ? All this is natural, and praise-worthy ; even the ladies think it advantageous. But what resemblance is there between this, and the

disfranchisement

disfranchisement of Boroughs? Can it be, with any shew of reason, maintained, that it is proper to take away charters? Perhaps it cannot. What is this to the purpose? we never dreamed of resting the strength of the argument here. We ask, in the first place, Is the possession just? We say, Sir, It is not, — and if so, then there can be no injury in depriving them of what they never constitutionally inherited. Respecting the right of voting, on which much hath been this evening said, I really think every man should have a voice, seeing every man hath life, liberty, and personal services, to preserve, and which may otherwise be maimed or destroyed. To sum up the matter, Sir, Is it not probable, that corruption will find easiest access in corporations, and where the voters are fewer, than in cities and large towns, where the numbers frequently would be contrasted, with the present case, as a thousand to one?

The eighth Speaker allowed the inequality of representation to be obvious. Whatever be the form of government, there must necessarily be many things resembling those in the natural world; where, though evils are inevitable, because, they remotely become the preventatives of greater, he, for similar reasons thought representation had better be kept on its present footing, than hazard the inconveniencies resulting

resulting from even the best intended alteration, Who can pretend to paint all the uproar and confusion that would attend annual elections? Notwithstanding so many advocates for this, stand forth, whose good sense and excellent reasoning, on other subjects, he so much admired.

In alluding to former Speakers this evening, he humbly conceived they had been rather contradictory in their remarks upon poverty and riches, as discriminating causes in election business.

He acknowledged it was a nice matter to disfranchise Boroughs; and before we conclude the expediency of the measure, we ought very closely to examine the consequences of what we mean to substitute in its room. No doubt, such a city as Westminster, ought to have more representatives, than the despicable Borough of Old Sarum. He warmly replied to the idea of a midnight bill; which, by the bye, he suspected were oftner fabricated under party influence, vulgarly called patriotic zeal, by those, who, though simply called opposers of the Minister, were, under that disguise, the bitterest and most prevalent enemies of their country. Clandestine were their proceedings — deep their schemes; — yet, happily, few of them, in consequence, were more than mere ephemera. What are your R——'s, R——'s, and S——'s, but the

the leaders of needy factious souls ? If you wish to give these noblemen a higher designation, they are the directors of your F—'s, your B——'s, and your B——'s, — who yelp at whomsoever their employers, and feeders hoot them.

The ninth Speaker immediately replied to the last ; then entered into a disquisition of the causes, why towns were so much crowded, and villages in these later days rather deserted : in explaining which, he displayed his usual candour and judgement ; and concluded with this remarkable assertion, relative to the point in debate, That the matter was more on a par than at first sight was credited ; for opposition buy votes as well as the other party, only fear their purse will not be able to keep pace with the Treasury bag.—The applause wherewith the Society received this, shewed their belief of its truth.

The Gentleman who concluded the debate, chiefly confined himself to reply to the midnight bill, as it had been painted by his literary friend in the gallery.—This idea was a good deal pursued this evening, though the substance of both the wit and the argument rested here : One side urged, that the schemes of Administration were such, as dreaded the light — being unable to stand an impartial scrutiny ; wherefore they courted the shade, and could only receive
a sanction

a sanction from the hours of darkness.—With equal poignancy, it was replied, Just the reverse. So assiduous are the Ministry, that they labour night and day for the public weal, and if these bawling Patriots were as vigilant for the welfare of their country, as they pretend, they would not grudge even the midnight hour, to prevent a bill passing, which they deemed unfriendly to the interests of their constituents, and the body of the people at large.

The question being put, it was carried, That depriving the petty Boroughs of the liberty of sending members to Parliament, and adding their quotas to the counties and cities, would be likely, to remove the evils attending an influenced election.

A P R I L 3d, 1780.

Is it agreeable to the Maxims of sound Policy, for any Protestant Government to tolerate Popery?

NO sooner was the question read from the chair, than a Gentleman judiciously observed, that some Protestant governments were so situated, as rendered the toleration unavoidable: besides, they were under such predicaments, that ere we enquired, what was politic or impolitic for them to do? — it would be necessary to examine their various connexions and forms of police, which he apprehended to be quite foreign to the question, as intended by the proposer: — wherefore he humbly moved, That instead of the words “any Protestant government,” “Great Britain” should be put. This amendment being approved of — the same Gentleman spoke to this effect:

Mr. President,

By my opening this important debate, in which every Protestant subject of this country is concerned, do not think I am the author of it. Believe me, Sir, the first intimation I had of it, came from the News-papers of the day, and a

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conviction

conviction of its propriety and weight, as it now stands, brought me here.

The matter scarce admits a doubt—for who, apprized of the doctrines and practices of Popery, will attempt to reconcile them to our liberties, civil and ecclesiastical? Did we grant the affirmative of the question, it would fall little short of excluding, at least as to the ideas of right, the present family from the throne; who, under the most solemn oaths and declarations of Protestantism, possible to be devised by human wisdom, originally obtained it. We need only cast our eyes on the formalities of a coronation, to perceive the peculiarity of the obligation. That a breach thereof may forfeit the Crown, look at the contemptible and misguided family of Stewart. What else disrobed them of majesty — drove them from the realm, and overwhelmed those deluded princes in the deepest misery?

Loose notions of toleration have done a world of mischief. The doctrine of unlimited toleration is singularly palatable to the present age: probably owing to this, that the medium between such a toleration, and a gross ignorance of all kinds of religious truths, with the usual concomitant, a vicious practice, is scarce perceptible. I wish every man to enjoy with security his own opinions in religion; but there is a wide difference

difference betwixt his doing this, and his trying every means to propagate them : notwithstanding the easiness of proving them inimical to the well being of society, and the dearest rights of mankind. Such, I confess, I think the Romish are — ergo, not to be tolerated.

With astonishment did I lately read the pages wrote by a Gentleman of the Temple ; wherein he asserts, that government hath nothing to do with opinions ; as if these were not the prompters to action. That non-resistance and passive obedience are due to Kings, this writer confesses to be a tenet of the church of Rome ; — and what Briton of a genuine breed, would not rather lose the last drop of blood, than assent to the infernal doctrine ! When Sovereigns forget they are men, they instantly become unfit for the trappings of royalty ; — and he who can be absurd enough to imagine, the great Creator of the universe made millions to be subservient to the caprice of his temper, or the fury of his passions, must himself have been formed of the grossest clay, and animated by a most diabolical soul !

Another article of their despicable creed, is, that no faith is to be kept with heretics ; — and need I tell you, Sir, they stamp all with that designation, who are not within the pale of their communion ? Is not this overturning all mo-

ality—destroying every civil compact, and tearing out by the root, all common honesty ? Is it not opening a door, nay, furnishing an excuse, for every species of wickedness ?

The dethroning of princes forms another part of their eccentric system. No less than 15 Popes have usurped this circumstance in practice, which the rest in theory have asserted ; and of the 15 monarchs, whom they excommunicated, two were in this country ; viz. King John, and King Henry the Eighth.

He was followed by a Gentleman, who gave it as his opinion, that universal toleration is right ; nor thought it prudent for the State ever to interfere with religious sentiments, whether orthodox or heterodox ; or indeed, whether there were any settled modes of belief at all. Considering the use generally made of them, and the actions to which they impelled, with the turn frequently given to the temper, it was to him problematical, whether a man totally devoid of what goes under the name of religion, did not make the best member of society ?

What right have we to blame those not educated as we are ? Here the matter greatly rests — since if we had been born there, we should have been Roman Catholics, and they, if born here, would be staunch Church of England men — each, perhaps, equally ignorant of the evidences

evidences of Christianity ; save that they tenaciously adhered to the first form submitted to their view. Consequently, arraigning a man for being of this, and of that religion, is the same, as if a man found fault with Heaven, for disposing his lot, rather in one place, than in another. On which grounds, this Gentleman maintained it politic, to tolerate Popery, and whatever else people had a mind to ; for, said he, persecutions are under each mode, and only differ in name, or in the manner of displaying themselves.

The third Speaker contended, it was an axiom in politics, to encourage population as much as possible. What effects this, becomes an object of serious deliberation to the State. With respect to religion, it is common to talk concerning it, without caring much about it. It keeps us a little longer from yawning, when we have got nothing entertaining to say ; and then for the most part, it tires us so fast, that being the last subject we enter upon, we get soon languid—then think of going to bed.

By not tolerating Catholics, we rob the state of useful members, in the several departments of arts, manufactures, and even in the learned professions. Science depends much upon an enlarged turn of mind, which positively prohibits all consideration paid to religious distinctions.

The splendor to which this country hath arisen, is not owing to one particular nation or set of men, but to an assemblage gathered from every quarter. Might not a Daniel de Foe hence say, that a true-born Englishman was a contradiction, knowing England, like Rome, assimilated what was useful from every corner of the globe, to lay the foundation of its own greatness? A Swiss — a Russian — a Frank — and an Englishman, are on a par, with relation to their utility in manufactures, supposing their knowledge and strength to be equal. Ought we to be ungrateful? and are we not so, in denying protection and liberty to the Roman Catholics, though we own ourselves much indebted to the Huguenots indeed; who, flying from persecution, enriched us with their knowledge and assiduity? Most of what we possess in this respect, came from the eastern parts of Europe. Shall we exclude them? Will it be politic? would it be wise?

Mankind, Sir, are like potatoes — keep them long upon one ground, and they lose their virtue — cross them, and you mend the breed. — He complimented the first Gentleman for the warmth and tenor of his sentiments, with which he coincided upon the whole; and begged leave just to remind him, that too much zeal often ruins itself, by its own heat and impetuosity. Leave Religion to its native worth and influence;

ence; to its duties and their product. By these let it stand or fall. Away with your lazy Lords Spiritual — they are the proud flesh of your constitution; — make Peterboroughs, or Preachers, of them all.

Popery hath been described lately in most hideous forms. — Because we once heard of a Hydra, must we always conclude there exists one? How puerile the thought! there is no danger of its spreading now; men know too much to receive its absurdities, or do any thing but laugh at the ridiculous edifice of its pompous insignificance. The pretensions of the Romish Church are not more blasphemous than they are false: It a little dazzles at first sight — but all behind the curtain is abomination and darkness. Ignorance is truly the mother of Catholic devotion. The story of the Protestants in the valley of Piedmont — the massacre of Paris, which lasted for eight days, and in which above an 100,000 Protestants were slain, with such like, affright the imagination, harrow up the soul, and when coolly reflected on, fill with the most disgusting ideas. But civilization having made greater progress, no country or government on earth, durst now, with safety, attempt such horrid scenes of blood.

Taking the subject in a different point of view, as connected with the liberties of this

country, I really think it wrong to tolerate them. Because, Sir, I believe there is such a thing as polished barbarism — strange as the expression may seem, 'tis true, — nor are the steps from the one to the other so difficult, as we are apt to conceive. Now considering the servility of Frenchmen, and the well known arts of the Catholics, I really apprehend it to be dangerous, and highly impolitic, to tolerate them.

The Gentleman who spoke fourth in the debate, principally confined his observations to the last and second Speaker.—Whether he had heard the applause given to a Gentleman, who, some months before, had obtained universal praise, from entertaining the Society, by an excellent speech, in the form of dialogue between him and his friend, we shall not say: he, however, pursued the same tract. He mentioned his speech to his friend, against Popery; viewing it as a system hostile to freedom, and the rights of mankind. His friend replied,—That it was entirely owing to early prejudices, why we had the least objections to the reception of one religion more than another; the high æra of mental improvement corrected these, and led to more just inferences. The maxim, *Nulla fides tenenda cum heretico*, might once have been

been true, and in former times dangerous, but is far from being so now.

Another argument is — the supreme power claimed in temporals, as in spirituals, by arrogant Rome : consequently, as the Reverend Mr. W—y says, in his printed letter, “ They can give no security for their peaceable deportment.” His friend replied, This must be wrong reasoning—were it simply for this, that wherever Popery is established, we find the laws of justice and common honesty equally followed as in other countries.

The third argument he adduced, for the impolicy of tolerating Popery, is, that one of the essentials claimed by his most fallible Holiness the Pope, is, the power of pardoning sin ; a circumstance of so atrocious a nature, that the man who dare assert it, must be a villain ; and he who can believe it, must be a fool.

Much have we heard from themselves, or their abettors, about their turn for persecution being changed. God grant it may be so—but surely the best way of proving this, would have been to mention times and opportunities, where they have had the power, without manifesting the inclination. How can we then be sure, the boasted change hath taken place ? What can we reason, but from what we know ? Did they not make our streets swim with blood ? Did they not, when they with impunity could, make the
fires

fires arising from the martyrdom of Protestants, even fright the skies ? And shall we unguardedly shake hands with such people ? Forbid it propriety, and a concern for truth !—Those who would force the unnatural cement, do nothing less, in fact, than say, Well, let us unite, and by our charity convince them, our breasts easily forgive ; though we never yet were in their power, when they did not play the tyrant.—On the contrary, his friend thought the Roman Catholics were adherents to public virtue.

The Society seemed to regret he did not tell them, how his friend proved this.

According to him, it signified not, whether mankind worshipped Mars, or Venus, or Jesus, and the Apostles. After all, he thought Christianity was established upon grounds of a political nature, too firm to be shaken.

Our Orator seemed now to have caught conviction from his friend, and therefore exclaimed—Who, Mr. President, doth not know, that the papal power rose upon the ruins of the Romish Empire, and effected that by policy, which the other did by valour ? Now and then, indeed, specious pretexts were found ;—for instance, what sainted Thomas-a-Becket, save, that contrary to the ordinary juridical proceedings of this country, he was put to death ?—After a very natural series of events, a reformation took place ;

place, and emigrants from this country, became enemies to it. All which favours my conclusion, that we should unite in defence of our native soil, be our religious tenets what they will. Universal and unshackled toleration, therefore, I think right.

Respecting Ireland, the man is to be held in perpetual estimation, who brought in the Bill, the tendency whereof, was to destroy the usual animosities, and coagulate such apparently opposite interests. His idea of the term toleration, in truth, was, that every man should think, at least in religious matters, just as he pleased; and acknowledged, that he always had admired the idea of Swift—importing, that the civil magistrate has no right to interfere with speculative opinions; though it is his province to prevent the publication of them, if they are repugnant to either the established police, or religion of the country.

The Gentleman who spoke fifth, was a Roman Catholic, but apparently of a very liberal turn of mind. To this effect he said :

Mr. President,

On religious questions, beyond all others, it is exceedingly difficult to lay aside partialities, whether contracted from clime, habit, or education. To decide with precision on such a point,

as that before us, we must divest ourselves of these, which when done, will both fix our judgment, and better it.

No countryman is sensible of his absurdities, till he sees them contrasted with the manners of others; on which account, he apprehended natural rusticity to be in a great measure taken off by the sprightliness of foreigners. We Englishmen have far better heads and hearts, than tempers. We want something to enliven us, which those of other countries bring us, consequently, their introduction conduces to our melioration. Why suspect danger, without a cause of fear? A Prince once upon the British throne, intended to make Popery the religion of this country; view the price he paid for the attempt!

Besides, why complain so bitterly of an Act, which only gives a little liberty to a very great body of people in this country, which the Roman Catholics certainly are. Nor is it more than they are entitled to; seeing a Protestant may live peaceably, and without molestation, any where, save in Spain. The present distressed circumstances of this country, induce us to make them our friends; that they have shewed themselves so, is a point which none can deny.

He was followed by a Gentleman, who declared

clared his ignorance of the evils resulting from the toleration. They had never fallen under this observation. As to the maxim, which had been so peculiarly insisted on, namely, *Nulla fides tenenda cum heretico*, why dwell so much, upon what in common life produces no bad effects? When did you ever see them break the rules of morality, pleading the above as an excuse? If they can be proved good subjects, why not tolerate them? We own there have been massacres; but consider those times, and the present, with the maxims regulating the one and the other. It is moreover, contrary to truth, that Papists are hostile to liberty—witness Ireland, where there are more Roman Catholics than Protestants; yet see the stand they have lately made, in defence of their rights and privileges:—witness Holland, where there is the existence of liberty;—or look at the Swiss Cantons, supported by their freedom, and unshaken union, most religiously preserved, notwithstanding they are, in a great measure, made up of Papists.

Protestants are tolerated in France, as Papists are in England: and some of the greatest characters in that kingdom, who have reached the highest honours, belong to that persuasion—witness Marshal Saxe—Durand—and Neckar, their present financier.

Are we, Sir, at this time of day, to dispute about rituals and ceremonies? No surely. Look
at

at Pennsylvania—contemplate its thousands—and then say, What praise is due to Mr. Penn? I wish not for the establishment of Popery; at the same time, should be sorry to see Protestants copy their manners. Even in France, the power of the Pope is despised; neither is it possible for common sense to act otherwise, when uncontrouled by prejudice, or unswayed by interest.

The subsequent Speaker, from the idea and definition of toleration, apprehended, there flowed a right for every man to think and talk about religion, as he pleased; for, as the kingdom of God was not of this world, the affairs of the present could suffer little or no damage from any disquisition concerning the other.

Another argument for the most unlimited toleration, is, the influence it hath upon population. Need we repeat the trite remark, that the strength of a country consists in the number of its inhabitants? No. Whatever then hinders or discourages foreigners to settle amongst us, must be truly impolitic: and will any thing more impede this, than being denied the exercise of their religion? Amidst other puerile articles, dwelt on by the enemies to the toleration of Papists, they wish us to think our liberties are in danger from them. Quod si cœlum ruat? I thought common sense had long ago exploded.

'Tis

'Tis Protestants, not Papists, who perpetuate the remembrance of Smithfield fires: the motives actuating Roman Catholics then, do not now exist. We need be in no terror from them. Severe and cruel they may have been once—at present, they are the chimera of the mind. Consider the state of this country 400 years ago; yet patriotism prevailed then, more than now. From these reflections, it strikes me, that the toleration of them is politic, nay wise.

To this Speaker, the next warmly retorted to this effect :

Mr. President,

Sir, I would hold it incongruous to propriety, to arraign, or praise, any state of religion in general ; yet cannot avoid discerning the justice, wherewith this may be done, in some cases, more than others. None ever studied the tenets of the church of Rome, together with the decretals of their Popes, without perceiving how absolute their hierarchy is, in the exertions of prerogative ; and how inimical to every thing, save their own pretensions, their very virtues are.

If ever ignorance, the sister of Popery, creeps in, Popery herself will quickly follow. Offspring of darkness — ugly sisters twain ! The characters of their priests—their real ends, together with the means they take for the accomplishment

plishment of these, continue as before:— The situation of that people is changed—the spirit of their religion remains unaltered. Since they have wormed themselves in so plentifully amongst us ; let us make the best possible use of them. Still the old proverbial saying holds true, That it is an exceeding happy thing to know when we have enough. I would not turn them out, as Lewis the XIVth did the Protestants ; but would advise the utmost caution, in the settling of those privileges, which we grant them. Doubtless, Sir, French valets may mightily help the morality of our wives—and their dancing-masters, and milliners, tend to raise the purest ideas of virtue, in our sisters and daughters. Setting raillery aside, on a subject so serious, let us ask this simple question, Should they get into power, will they tolerate us ? So far from it, they call us heretics—already with our destruction—nor are backward to applaud any scheme intended to annoy us. He must reason contrary to the sense of mankind, who from the hissing of the serpent, concludes the reptile to be friendly to him.

As men, let us shew our candour by the liberty we give and take—as Christians, let our philanthropy display itself, various as the streams, which glide adown the gladdened hills : but let us never forget, that being Britons, Po-
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pery is inimical to our constitution. Despotism and Popery are also sisters; for where is the country, where the latter is established, except the former hath a prevalency? Religion and politics are conjoined. Keep your religion pure, and the constitution will stand each other kind of shock.

Permit me, Sir, to differ from the Gentleman, who was so particular in the definition of the word Toleration. He appears to me to be in the wrong; since, though the term means, to bear with, it is straining it indeed, to suppose it admits the idea of cherishing; which the act complained of, certainly does.

The Gentleman who spoke next, gave great information to the Society. He was a stranger, said to be a Scotch Clergyman, who, as tutor to some nobleman's son, had just finished the tour of Europe. If we may judge from the small specimen we had, he was not only well qualified for the task, but had travelled like a student of human nature, with his attention most feelingly alive.

So far, Mr. President, said this intelligent Orator, is the spirit of that religion from being amended for the better, that a decretal, so late as Pope Gregory, gives us the fullest grounds to draw our conclusion. I have heard this evening, that Protestants are tolerated in France,

as much as Papists are in England. I wish the Gentleman had named the province where this took place ; and had corroborated it, by indulging us with a rehearsal of some of the proofs. I have, Sir, spent some time in France; and though it would have particularly gladdened me, could never trace any thing like this. Was it really so, would they tolerate inquisition-courts?—those unweildy engines, even of hell ! With what face can it be argued, in opposition to this one known truth, that they deny christian burial to Protestants, and the free perusal of religious books, whether against, or in defence of particular systems ?

From this, our Orator went to the Highlands of Scotland ; where, he deeply regretted, that the influence of the Romish Church was, by far, too great ; principally owing to their not, till lately, having had the requisite care paid to their education—in proportion as literature got ground, Popery of course, became contemptible. The Isle of Herries illustrated this. And what gave rise to the late disturbances, which happened in Scotland on account of religion, proceeded chiefly from the forwardness of Romish zeal ; thinking the minds of the people were more reconciled to it, than in fact, they really were.

In the city of Nice, I myself, in the year

1772,

1772; walking through their streets, and looking at their public buildings, beheld this inscription, Plenaria Indulgentia : after which, it did not surprize me, to see such crouds flocking thither. Would you, Sir, or this Society, have a stronger, or later proof, look at the terms annexed to the Douay Catechism, publishing for the space of three years, a pardon to all the subjects of his most *infallible* Holiness, dwelling in heretical countries beyond the sea, for whatever they might do or say, provided they only repeated three prayers, annexed to it.

Here this sensible Speaker made some remarks upon Ganganelli, the so much admired saint of many Catholics ; whom yet, a number of well meaning people suppose, to have had his death accelerated by those, too easily found in any religion, who judged him too cool in a religious cause. In fine, Sir, what can we conclude Popery to be, save a system of worldly power, invented by churchmen to aggrandize themselves ?

Heracitus replied ; That indeed one great reason why Papists have met with such indulgence, may have been a political one. Ignorance often helps to accomplish that, which a higher degree of science would never permit : therefore, Ministers having particular views, contrary to the constitution, discern the easiness of gaining those

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who

who are ignorant, rather than the more knowing. It is probable they might wish to see all trials here, as well as in Quebec, by jury of Catholics, rather than Protestants; for a very obvious reason, that the one will be easier ruled and managed, than the other.

Another consideration is, Sir, that the bias of priests ever hath been to favour the extremes of power: from the court of the profligate and abandoned Jeroboam, to that of the gracious Prince now upon the British throne, the genuine character of all priests have been the same, never to hazard too much for right, in opposition to interest. To prove which, we need only call to remembrance the Bristol petition, assuring his Majesty of their determination to support him with their lives and fortunes, till he reduced to obedience, his rebellious subjects in America, had no less than 17 Priests to it.

The last Speaker answered him, who, in the course of the evening's debate, had said, That the repeal went no farther, than to the qualification of them to purchase land. Even this was an intolerable grievance; since, in time, it would bring the landed property, in a great measure, into such a channel, that, being possessors, might enable them to influence elections, and by this means undermine our glorious constitution. But this was not all; by the late appeal,

peal, they also understood themselves licensed to teach openly, and do what they could to get scholars. Many proofs of this could be quoted. Nor did the matter rest here; they, according to the description given us by one, who well knew their forefathers the Pharisees, compassed heaven and earth to make one proselyte. For ought we know it goes farther, since, without reward, or the prospect of the necessary expences being defrayed, they undertook, nay, could be proved to have been at most extraordinary pains, to get the education of the children of protestants. This was not only offered to poor people, but attempts were made to those of more easy circumstances. Were it not for fear of hurting the delicacy of those to whom they were made, we could name individuals. This eagerness to propagate their religion, evident in all periods of their history, appears from nothing more than this, that there is, or lately was, at Compostella in Spain, a college, dedicated to St. George, where eight Irish students are maintained for seven years; when they are obliged, by oath, to go and preach the Popish faith in one of the three kingdoms under the British crown.

They have also authorized them, by the late repeal, to preach wherever they can find ability to open houses of public worship.

Much hath been said about the oath of allegiance they take. A member of Parliament sent it me to peruse, wishing my opinion on it. I returned for answer, That no honest Roman Catholic could take it. I was mistaken — for they do most cordially, if we judge their principles by their words.

We know, when a man is admitted a Priest of the Holy Mother Church, the number of the solemn obligations he assumes ; yet, by another part of his belief, contradicts all this.

On the question being put, it was carried — That it is not agreeable to the maxims of sound policy, for Great Britain to tolerate Popery.

A P R I L 10th, 1780.

Whether it would not be more consistent with the Interests of the People of Great Britain, to immediately acknowledge the American Independance, upon the Terms of a general Peace, and a free Trade with them, in common with the rest of Europe; rather than to continue the War against the allied Powers, under our present Circumstances?

THIS question came from Heraclitus; and no sooner was read, than he spoke to the following effect:

Mr. President,

People ought to have an object in view, otherwise it is folly, nay, madness and cruelty, to hazard the spilling of human blood. Admitting this to be wise, just, and good, it would be proper for those strictly to adhere to the idea of a wise king, given by Him, who knew human nature better than all of those who spoke concerning it; viz. that ere he goes forth to war, he should count the cost, and seriously ponder

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the imminent danger of leading a weaker against a stronger power. But, alas ! our great men either did not know of such precepts, or they were above following them. Yet this excuses not their neglect, in calculating whether the play would pay the candle.

To assist our decision on a point of this kind, permit me to take a short view of the circumstances we are fallen from, and those we are in, with the probable benefits accruing from our complying with the tenor of this question.

Need I tell a British audience, many of whom are merchants interested in, and well acquainted with commerce, what this country hath fallen from ! Who doth not know, that previous to the commencement of the American war, we traded advantageously with the whole world, through the medium of America ? We were great — happy — and respected by all Europe.

Into what an abyss of political degradation are we fallen ! Besides the loss of 60,000 men, we are 200 millions in debt. Enormous sum ! Whence is the interest to arise ? By strange methods ; extraordinaries may for a time be raised. — This is a mere temporary expedient, which virtually accelerates our national destruction. Contrast our finances with those of France and Spain, and you will find, in spite of all the boasted art of our present financier, that they are
in

In a much worse situation. France, for some years past, hath begun to see her local advantages, added to those derived from an extended commerce — her alliance with America, the wisest step she ever took, hath greatly enlarged their notions of this matter; and from experience, established her wisdom. She hath, Sir, in a great degree, tasted the sweets, nor will it be an easy matter to make her renounce them. For years now she hath been basking in the easy enjoyment of that, which made us wealthy and great. The treasures of Spain, are to her, the inexhaustible means of carrying on an offensive war. Neither is that branch of the Bourbon family, so blind to the advantages of trade, and commercial alliances as formerly. Even Castilian pride now doth not entirely disdain the pursuits of commerce. Look at our navy and theirs. During the last peace of inglorious memory, while our ships were rotting in the harbours, and many useful mechanics refused admittance into our royal dock-yards; the house of Bourbon were gladly receiving, and liberally encouraging them; being bent on the improvement of their navy. They perceived what it was, which gave Britain the superiority in last war; and like wise men, they laboured with cheerfulness and assiduity, to get as nearly on a par as possible. The British fleet last summer be-
held

held a proof of their success ; nay, even the first Lord of the Admiralty owned, in the House of Lords, that they could build ships faster than we could. If report says true, they this summer will, conjoined with those of Spain, add to their fleet no fewer than 31 ships of the line.

Dare any Gentleman controvert the reform which hath taken place in the French navy ? Formerly their commanders were landsmen, or macaronies ; whereas now, they are men taken from merchant ships—honest sailors, who have served apprenticeships to the business—plowed the ocean for their knowledge—made judicious remarks upon other nations and modes of service ; of course, are skilled in maritime affairs. We, on the contrary, have been forcing our seamen into the employment of other nations, more sensible of their worth. By ill judged, and worse timed partiality to some commanders, and prejudice to others, the ancient British spirit is depressed. Since the beginning of the present troubles, we have had far more court martials, than martial engagements.

To come nearer home : See, Sir, in what a ferment the affairs of Ireland are ! Long submissive to the hard yoke of ministerial influence, limited trade, and rigorous taxation, they can bear no longer ; but dare to be free : they claim their natural rights, and seem, if we may

may guess from appearances, resolved to assert them.

Turn next to the West Indies; which, without America, must for ever lay much exposed to the French or Spaniards, where, they will have eleven sail more than last year. We all know it then proved impossible for us to prevent some of our islands falling into their hands—our fleet there, hath not received a proportionable increase; since, by all accounts, the fleet that went last from New York, is perfectly scattered in a heavy storm.

How do we stand in point of alliances? Devoid of any. Every power in Europe, either hostile to us, or secretly wishing our downfall—or afraid to own an interest, by which they may chance to be losers. Add to all this, Sir, it would be absolutely impolitic in them, since it might be demonstrated, that it is the interest of every trading nation, that America should be free.

Here let me mention a few of the many effects likely to ensue our granting them independence, and a free trade. This will most effectually appear, by considering, First, What shall we lose by not doing it? Every probable chance of restoring the commerce of this country—or of long keeping the component parts of the State together. On the other hand, What shall

shall we gain by acknowledging independence ?
 — A great part of the trade, if not the whole.
 The whole, Sir, we have no title to expect. Of
 this, nevertheless, there is not the shadow of a
 doubt; they entertain a strong attachment to
 England, and have an esteem for Englishmen,
 however justly they execrate the men and mea-
 sures, to whom they owe their present woes.
 Numberless other circumstances concur to rivet
 this affection of the mind. With an heart-felt
 pleasure, with a virtuous joy, they call to mind
 their original. Each will talk with rapture, and
 steal the hours away, rehearsing the part of
 England whence, and the varied fortunes of the
 family, from which they boast their lineage.
 United in religious views, will mightily facili-
 tate the rejunction. The power of this motive
 is self evident; because moral virtue is not so
 universally practised, may be true: still, unity
 in religion, though merely in theory, hath a
 wonderful influence on the human heart. Nor
 are they hereby obliged to learn a new language;
 in which there also is a preponderation in our
 favour. All ranks understand the rules of deal-
 ing, and the forms of business, with the precise
 meaning of each term used. Nay, if I may use
 a flight of fancy, so powerful will be the springs
 of attraction, that the ships themselves, from
 that

that part of the world, shall sail for the British shore.

The second Speaker was a modest young man, a stranger ; who owned himself unaccustomed to speak in public ; yet need never fear the being well received, if we may form an opinion from the manner he acquitted himself this evening. He first remarked the nature of the present war was commercial. Whoever hath the superiority at sea, must be victors. Gentlemen on both sides the question, seem to allow that our fleet amounts to about 100 sail ; that of the foe, discounting those lately taken by Rodney, and others of our admirals and captains, do not go far beyond 101 ; and those, in the gross, supposed to be inferior in number of guns, and weight of metal. Whence I infer, I hope with an equal title to credibility, as many things uttered by the last Speaker, the disparity between our navy and theirs, is not so great as that Gentleman would have us believe. Neither, without my dissentient voice shall it ever pass, whether directly or indirectly said, that British officers are in point of discipline, valour, or reform — let the Gentleman call it what he will — in the least *iota* beneath those of France. The very idea, I know not whether to call more unmanly, or more ungenerous in a Britain to form, much more to utter, before an audience of this kind.

Nay

Nay more, Mr. President, my humble opinion is, that this is an improper time to grant a peace. Success hath at last dawned upon the British arms, under the auspices of a long neglected (shame burn his country's cheeks) but gallant Rodney; and what thrills the joy in every heart — around the head — the youthful head of a Prince of Brunswick's royal line. Should this dawn brighten into unclouded day, our prospects will be entirely altered, and patriots themselves will be compelled to join the Poets of the time. How would we then blame ourselves! — and what might not posterity justly alledge, if we continued the contest under every discomfiture, yet resigned it whenever things turned in our favour.

Consider further, Sir, what we may, and do at this time call ours. Are these to be abandoned? Shall we drop Newfoundland — Canada — the West Indies! Forbid it interest — forbid it national honour! — Talk not of poverty — in many cases, especially when applied to States, it is the mean subterfuge of a coward. That we have resources, is evident from the wisdom of Lord North, who hath laid on the taxes so judiciously, on what can easiest bear them, that really we may individually say, they are scarce felt.

O thou glorious soul of the immortal Wolfe!
look

look down indignation on those, who would for peace meanly barter the product of thy martial toil, and ever to be lamented death! Why sink under fears arising from our want of allies, or from the number of our foes? Was ever this the characteristic of an Englishman? Till this evening, never did I hear it used as an argument for desisting from war. Think, Sir, on the state of England in Elizabeth's time, beset with manifold and warlike adversaries, threatened with an armada, deemed by a haughty Philip to be invincible. What measures did that illustrious Queen pursue? Why, Sir, in opposition to the mode recommended by the last Speaker, she vigorously exerted herself—disposed her armies properly—collected her ships; and by her own example, taught them not to fear. Viewing her fair pattern, let us imitate those, who, favoured by Heaven, fought and conquered under her royal banner.

Was there ever a Prince more embarrassed than William the 3d, of glorious memory; encircled with enemies abroad and at home—not knowing whom to trust; and unsettled in that throne, the real rights of which he had rescued, and laboured to secure. Did he flinch from the arduous task, or forget the cause, on account of his then seeing only the toil? He

stood unshaken in danger, and moderate in triumph.

That we cannot equal these, proceeds entirely from the want of unanimity among ourselves; our commanders, especially our admirals, were wont to pant for fame; and knew no strife, but that, of who should first, most gallantly strike the foe. Now they thirst for riches, and study only manœuvres. The times are changed, and we are changed with them: the grand question at this time is, Who is the greatest favourite with the First Lord of the Admiralty; or to what party in the House of Commons, doth this one, and that one adhere?

Our humourist next rose, and said,

Mr. President,

My mother was an exceeding good sort of an old woman, not more peculiar in her manner, than remarkable in her sayings; nor was she careless in the application of them. Things did not always please the old lady—few of our sex, more than of hers, are pleased with every thing—on which occasions she comforted herself by saying, We should make the best of a bad market. To point out the analogy of the proverb to the question before you, Sir, is needless. From facts, it appears, we succeed against the
French;

French, but almost in every instance have failed against our brethren. Why then not close the unprofitable contest, that we may with greater vigor, pursue the more successful, to which let me subjoin, the juster one?

The last Speaker, in rhapsody hath invoked the soul of Wolfe—a name not more indelibly stamped on the hearts of Englishmen, than in the records of fame.—Let me use the same privilege, and ask, Whether he would not be in greater astonishment, to see monks sitting in judgment on Protestants in Quebec, whence he had so gloriously expelled them?

A deal hath been said about the growing nature of the French fleet, and that last summer saw a British flee before them. As I never attempt impossibilities, God forbid I should take upon me to vindicate all that happened last summer, relative to our fleets. May'nt I, nevertheless, use the freedom to tell what I think the affair resembles? School-boys have a play of this kind. One stands on some ground or rising hillock, called Tom Tickler's Ground—the rest of the boys strive to reach the summit, on which Tom Tickler stands; but are prisoners to him, if they don't get off before he catches them.—Just so was the French fleet's appearing off Plymouth last summer. They were, 'tis true, on Tom

Tickler's ground, but even there shewed symptoms of fear, lest he should catch them.

We have been told, their ships are all new ones—so much the better. I wish they had been all new last war, — since, considering the number we took, the greater advantage must have resulted to this kingdom. Rodney's bullets did not care whether they were old or new. His excellency gave them a door of utterance, and they made a door of entrance for themselves; and I truly believe, the illustrious Admiral, was happier to find them new ones, than old ones.

One Gentleman complains, we are destitute of alliances. Does he forget Omiah? Perhaps, Mr. Banks could get the Queen Obeera to be on our side; who might generously refuse to see us worsted. — The Highlands of Scotland can lend us many, whom they cannot maintain; and there are several songs of the Bards, yet untranslated, owing to the originals never having been either wrote or printed, which would operate more powerfully than those of the celebrated Tyrtæus.

At this very instant, we have many German Princes on our side; that is, if we pay them for it. There is the great and mighty Prince of Anspach, with some others, whose names, if rightly spelt, are more difficult to pronounce,

than would be a survey of their dominions. The Princess of Stolberg herself, cannot help glancing this way. America, it hath been suggested, will love us, from a recollection of what she hath suffered from us—strange reasoning !—but if true, then the French, I am sure, should doubly love us, for the many hard blows, and sound drubbings we have given them.

Concerning the West-Indies, why multiply words ? It is not to the point to say, We lived and flourished before we knew them, and long ere we possessed them. Britons once lived contented, though naked in the woods. Could we do so now ? No ! Then, no more can we, in a commercial capacity, exist without them.

A Gentleman hath said, Lord N—'s taxes are not felt—Heaven knows, what sort of feelings his must be ! I shall leave him to them, being assured, they are totally different from the general feelings of Englishmen.

The Gentleman who spoke fourth in the debate, made one of the warmest speeches, in favour of Government, we ever heard. We were always glad to hear such—because it fomented debate ; and there were invariably, many eager to reply on the other side.

This Gentleman, well known at Coach-maker's-hall, was rather a stranger with us, which we accounted a loss. He made an intro-

duction, full of masculine sense, and much to the point; then declared against granting independence to America—Because, Mr. President, said he, America wishes it; neither will rest satisfied with any thing short of it. Let idle declaimers say what they will—influenced, for the most part, by the diabolical motive of stirring up the people to sedition—no man who loves his King, will allow, that America is departed from him: no, nor never shall depart, while there is a thousand, that will die in opposition to it. Whoever thinks, or is willing to act otherwise, must be a parricide indeed.

There are, I know, who have traiterously wished to see the 13 United Stripes flying here; who care nothing for England, so be that America prevails. Forbid it Heaven! may their tombstone be their burden, ere their eyes are fatiated with such infamy! But were this ever to happen, I would impute it to the too great lenity of our laws, in permitting spies, or suspicious characters, to live so securely amongst us. When I was in Paris, some years ago, I could not enter a coffee-house, where the most interesting affairs of this country, nay, the very resolves of its cabinet councils, did not form a part of the conversation. One particular I will narrate. At Coachmaker's-hall, I had frequently heard young L—s, son to the late President,

President of the Congress, declaim on politics, and shew, in his words, an anxious concern for the liberties of Great Britain :—who, when in Paris, I heard boasting how dexterously he had played his part—what he had learnt—and while he accused this country, he prayed to see America triumphant.

He was followed by a Gentleman, who, in opposition to what had very warmly fallen from the last Speaker, said, he hoped to see the 13 Stripes wave in every English harbour, from a foederal union ; nay, be quartered by our posterity, if we were so obstinately foolish, as not to do it ourselves, on the British ensign. The war, he thought, was begun in ignorance, and carried on in error ;—and will now—except by immediately acknowledging the independence of that country, and granting her a free trade with the rest of Europe—terminate in disgrace to us.

We have not been content in employing Tomahawks—German mercenaries—almost more savage than the former, but we have racked invention itself, to devise unprecedented means for their destruction. By the interference of plausible Commissioners, such as a J—, or macaronies, such as a C—, we have tried the force of bribery among their friends, or to sow dis-

sension among them ; while we have been mortified with failure, in every attempt .

The Gentleman who spoke sixth, was an ingenious Schoolmaster.

The war, Mr. President, was not unpremeditated—two years were spent in tampering with that unhappy people ;—so far was Administration from being rash, that their slowness hath been the primary cause of most of those mischiefs which have happened. Had they been active and firm at first, all might now, respecting this country, have been well. Their foes, equally as their friends, at this juncture, upbraid them on this account ; during which space of time, however, nothing from America was offered, that Ministry could with propriety receive, or to which the Crown, consistent with its prerogative and dignity, could assent. We gave up many advantages for them : nor hesitated to part with our most valuable acquisitions last war, that they might be satisfied ; and, in their own opinion, live at ease. The ties of relation, to be delightful, much more useful, must be reciprocal. When this is actually the case, I apprehend, Sir, nothing merely chimerical can disturb or break it. Will posterity believe the wondrous tale, when no record, previous to those of our day, ever knew of a country, which, rose
against

against the mother country, from apprehension alone, save America ?

I have also been in Paris, but did not perceive any instances, more than is ordinarily met with in all countries, of what the Gentleman who spoke last but one, mentions.

Here this Speaker made several severe strictures on the H—s, both by sea and land ; on the frivolous objections which had been made to power ; and, on the negligence, to call it by no harsher name, of their public conduct ;—which remarks were not much relished by the Society ; and as this Gentleman was always attentive to order, perceiving this,

He reverted to the Gentleman, who indulged us with a short history of his mother ; and, since we remained owners of considerable territories in America, begged the good old woman's verb might be sent there. To them it equally applies, as to us ; for their affairs are still more wretched than ours, consequently, there is some hope it may strike them ; at any rate, make the experiment—teach it them. Such minute discussion have representation and taxation, at various times received, that I will not tire the patience of this respectable company, in dwelling upon it. We have heard many remarks on ships—the nature of them—the effects of particular diets on seamen ; together with se-

veral other things, which may be easily asserted, and yield pleasing enough speculations ; but in politics, and in morals, we ought to take nothing for granted. Wherefore, I am against granting Independence to America ; but rather wish the war against her to be vigorously prosecuted.

The Gentleman who spoke next, said very little, and still less to the purpose.

He was followed by a very lame Speaker ; who said, If the probability is as two to one, that the Americans will never give up independence, why continue the contest ? Respecting their alliance with France, whether it be a wise one on their part, is not the present business to examine : it can't be denied, that it is a powerful one, in the mean time. On the part of France, we all know the motive ; and that her primary view was, a diminution of English power.

The ninth Speaker was an American refugee ; an amiable young man, who argued well ; and spoke very modestly, but feelingly, on the point.

Mr. President, the last Speaker hath done little more than tell us, that two and two make four. Not denying the truth, I shall say less concerning it. France and Spain would have other requisitions to make, should Independency
be

be granted them. The British Lion hath slumbered ; shall he, on that account, when awake, crouch to American ingratitude, and Gallic perfidy ? Proofs whereof, like the old *Punica Fides*, every nation can adduce ! Has our noblest blood been spilt, and our treasures drained, to support a cause which, in the end, we tamely relinquish ? Will this appease the manes of those whose bodies filled the trenches, or strewed a Bunker's-hill—who got a watery grave off Charlestown—or perished ere they reached the ignominious plains of Saratoga ? Surely no ! My feeble voice is, That the war be prosecuted. Though I differ in opinion from a learned Gentleman, on your left hand, whose peculiarity of sentiment I shall not criticise—but can say, for my own, that notwithstanding I have been stripped of my possessions, and have lost the bulk of my property in the quarrel ; yet I shall never put private sufferings in competition with the interest and glory of the British Crown. While my country is safe, my heart shall be at ease. Be my own fate what it will, or the fate perhaps of thousands in similar circumstances, I would lend my active arm to subdue the rebellious colonies.

These last remarks called up the Doctor, in great warmth ; who, by a rule of construction, peculiar to himself, considered them as personal allusions ;

allusions ; to wipe off which, he gave us a most tedious account of himself and his family, for many generations, — told us in what counties the elder branches resided — their fortunes — what offices they had held, at different times, under the Crown—especially in America.

During the time he did this—some called out, " The question !" others, " Let us have no " genealogy !" — All which, according to his usual custom, the Doctor heard unmoved—so went on with his dull tale ; after which, becoming rather calmer, he recollected the question, and replied to the Gentleman, who had quoted the heroism of Queen Elizabeth, and King William, in perplexed situations ; when he clearly proved, that the reference from these to the present instance, was not just : in the first place, because both these Sovereigns reigned in the hearts of their people ; and secondly, their cause was really a good one.

On the question's being put, it was decided, almost unanimously—That it would be more consistent with the interests of the people of Great Britain, to immediately acknowledge, the American Independance,

APRIL

A P R I L 17th, 1780.

Is it not a general duty to associate for the restoring of Annual Parliaments, and equal Representation, as being immediately necessary, in order to effectual œconomy, and constitutional independence, the safety and happiness of the people ?

THE Opener and Author of this question, was the able Counsellor, who, a little before this period, favoured the public with an argument on the nature of party and faction; in which he considered the duty of a good and peaceable citizen, at the present crisis; and on constitutional principles, examined the point. Probably, to impress the minds of his fellow-citizens more deeply with the momentous truth, he desired the President to bring forward this question; and to his requests, the President ever made a point of paying proper regard; not solely as a mark of the estimation he had for the Counsellor's understanding, but as a suitable return to the genteel mode in which he asked.

This evening, prompted by his own accurate sense of propriety, he set out with an introduction, concerning the greatness of the question—

There

There are two articles in the question — if disjoined they will be ineffectual — if not, they will be productive of happiness to this country. To speak to this question, is to combat high authorities: but when truth guides us, these we shall not fear. Scarce an advocate will now plead for septennial Parliaments. The advantages of annual, rather than triennial Parliaments, are so obvious, that to name them, may, by the bulk of this Society, be thought unnecessary. In the first place, triennial Parliaments, for which some respectable names have warmly contended, are no part of our constitution; whereas, annual Parliaments are the right, the constitutional usage of the people. We have evidence of yearly writs, for the election of a new Parliament, in every year of Edward the third, for sixteen years then, three only excepted, for which writs are not found; but the presumption is fair, that they did exist. Annual Parliaments may be traced as far back as the times of Alfred the great. The business of our Senators in those days, was to make a few wise laws, expressed with a simple dignity and conciseness; not a multitude of discordant ones, loaded with redundancy of words, and perplexity of matter. They had no contested elections to settle. They granted or withheld the supplies, on extraordinary occasions, as instructed by those constituents, and authorized by the sense of the people. By
maintaining

maintaining national freedom and integrity, by a jealous and wise œconomy; by liberal contributions for public, not private purposes, they cherished that spirit, and those resources, which conduct wars with vigour, and terminate them with glory. Treaties they left to the executive power. If base or treacherous, by the fault of Ministry — impeachment — severe inquiry, and exemplary punishment, followed. Then Parliaments yielded no shelter to misconduct, nor gave the sanction of authority to delinquents against the nation.

I again say, Sir, annual Parliaments have been the usage of a country, where population hath most rapidly increased; where commerce, agriculture, and all the great blessings of Society, have flourished. It was by destroying constitutional freedom, that intestine wars at least, and desolation, were introduced; and that the parts of great and populous states, separated from their natural centre. The incorrupt system of the constitution, was the grand point, round which they revolved freely, but regularly; and might, for ages, have continued to revolve, receiving and imparting light and happiness, had arbitrary sway not usurped the place of reciprocal attraction, and driven them from their orbit. Experience shews, that tumults would be

be lessened, did not undue influence so much prevail !

Neither would the inconvenience be so great as some imagine—the people might assemble by parishes, or other certain divisions : there would not be the rage of novelty, after an interval, as now, of seven years, to put their minds in a ferment, and when as many, nearly at least, would be to be bribed, even on Mr. Burgh's plan of representation, in order to gain a majority in the House, as now there are of electors in the island, when petty Boroughs are thrown into the county, as Shoreham has been already, or added to the towns, so that no place might have a separate representation, which had not a number of electors in proportion to the whole, equal to the proportion of a single representative to the whole House ;—should this be done, corruption would not be retrenched, but eradicated. No individual, by such means, would lose any thing that he ought to hold, or could rationally wish, and the great branches of the legislature, would acquire strength and perpetuity. The House of Commons would then be the independent representative of a free people :—the House of Peers would shine in its proper dignity, and the Crown would preside with glory, the first member of a pure legislature, and the head of an united and invincible people. Then might

might we expect to renew our connexion with America, on permanent and beneficial terms, as with brethren, and equal friends, by a fœderal union.

The increase of population, since the time of Edward the third, if it be real, calls for the enlarging the number of the elective body. If, from various causes, there is reason to apprehend, what a late essay, I fancy, hath irresistibly proved, that we are decreased, to an alarming degree, since the revolution; that freedom, security of property, confidence in the government, improvement of public morals, the natural result each of the other; and all, of equal and annual Parliaments, may be expected to set bounds to this decline, as also to forward population.

From the time mentioned in the reign of Edward the third, till the reign of Henry the eighth, a space of near two hundred years, they were generally annual, and never more than triennial: till that Monarch, breaking all bounds of rights, human and divine, found, in his own case, the convenience of long Parliaments; and with such Parliaments, he made laws, at the absurdity of which, common sense is astonished, and at whose cruelty, humanity revolts. Indeed, annual Parliaments are an essential part of our free Saxon constitution. The charge hath been committed

mitted most solemnly, by this great metropolis, to her respectable representatives: — the fact hath been urged, with patriotic firmness, both in the House, and out of it. Annual Parliaments, 'tis true, are intirely opposite to corrupt interests; but every honest principle recommends, and demands them.

It was in the infamous reign of Henry the sixth, the great body of the people lost their rights; the preamble to which abominable statute, talks of elections for Knights to serve in Parliament, made by great, outrageous, and excessive numbers of people, whereby nothing ill is stated to have happened; but (manslaughter, riots, batteries, and divisions might arise, and be; and for convenient and due remedy of this chimæra) this great number in the several counties, were stript of the first privilege of civil society, and bore it tamely; so much to their wrong, were they called outrageous.

If we fairly examine our representation at present, we must condemn it, whether we consider the electors, or elected. The electors of 254 representatives (a majority of the number which hath been assembled on the greatest questions — of the number which constitutes an house, full almost to a prodigy,) this majority is chosen by less than six thousand persons — great part of them dependents on the worst kind of influence,
miserable

miserable in purchased servitude to the slaves, it may be, of slaves. The claims of some of these Boroughs, founded on populousness at the time, though now the vestige of their ruins can scarce be discerned — of others, on the caprice or worse motive of kings — of many, where the writ was general — on the arbitrary pleasure of the sheriffs, ripened by time into a confirmed abuse, but not into law; unless we recognize, contrary to reason and law itself, prescriptions against the public liberty, against the constitution, against sound policy, and natural justice. A tenth part of the House of Commons, is chosen effectually by much less than four hundred people, and in some places the representatives almost equal in number the electors. All proportion of representation is now confounded — inverted — lost. Go now, ye, who add insult to intolerable wrong! — go and tell the injured, the awakened feelings of this great people, the want of honesty in the nation is the cause of undue influence in Parliament: when, if nine hundred in every thousand were purity itself, there would be abundantly more corruption in the frailty of the nation, than the proportional number by which is chosen the efficient majority in that, which is at present called the House of Commons! Tell them, to be the honest, the enlightened, the patriotic guardians of this great

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country, which has suffered its rights of representation to sink into their hands ! Let them rise from indignant servility and corruption — from ignorance — from vitiated habits — from confirmed venality ; let this handful of wretched men, rise at the virtue — making voice of such advocates for national honesty ; such reprovers of that corruption which they cherish ! I trust they shall rise to public virtue — order — and freedom : but it must be by taking away the temptations, the moral necessity of evil, by blending them with the purifying mass of the people at large, by allowing their suffrage in counties or great towns, which have at present none, or only a destructive representation. Thus shall they have their vote free, instead of corrupt, honourable, not infamous, profitable to their country, and in the best sense, beneficial to themselves : instead of being an insufferable nuisance to their fellow subjects, and destructive of their own morals and honour. I doubt not, that even in these dependent Boroughs, there are honest public-spirited men — they will co-operate ; and as for the rest, when the contest is between the unjust claims of a venal few, and the necessary rights of above four hundred thousand, which is nearly twice as many as probably vote at present, or of about a million and a half, if competency to elect, were regulated by
the

the natural right of adult discretion, not by the arbitrary distinctions of property. I say, Sir, when such are the competitors, and such the competition; is it not ridiculous to ask, which ought to prevail, or which must prevail!—just strength, or corrupt weakness; a part or the whole; rectitude or iniquity; freedom or oppression; happiness or misery; the existence or the ruin of the State!

Let us attend a little to the objections made to annual parliaments, and equal representation.

It hath been argued, that increase of business hath rendered septennial requisite, otherwise matters of the greatest importance might be totally neglected, or injudiciously decided. Every one not voluntarily blind, must perceive, that this argument is unworthy of the name, but at any rate, if the liberties of the people ought to be the business of Parliament, then woeful experience must long ago have convinced us, that they have ill performed their duty.

In one year we have heard it alledged, Bills might not be ended. Whose fault this? Not the nature of these Bills, but the character of those to whose judgment they are referred, and the mode pursued in the investigation of them. Time was, when that venerable court directly fixed their attention on the object of the Bill, or the matter before them; nor quitted the

search till they had discerned right and wrong, just or unjust. Lately they have dwindled into the mode of a chamber counsel, quibbled on words, and play on times, terms, or persons. Owing to this, a year becomes insufficient for the arrangement of those affairs, which may come before them.

We have further been told, that there may be many worthy characters properly qualified, and well inclined to serve their country in the Great Senate of the nation, whose fortunes may be inadequate to the expences of an election. The answer is ready. Remove undue influence, and the expenditure of such sums ceases accordingly. Being annual, would, moreover, render bribery of little or no value : for the man willing to bribe, would probably be too selfish to give much money for a place, which he could only be sure of for one year. On the supposition of an equal representation taking place, a seat in Parliament must become more a place of trust and honour, than of profit.

This matter is necessary at all times, but peculiarly now in our present circumstances,—at war with mighty and allied powers—sunk in our national esteem among other kingdoms—ruined in our manufactures—disunited among ourselves—unharmonized in our fleets and armies—to which add, the miserable state of our public credit,

credit, and the enormous load of taxes under which we groan.

One word more, Sir, on triennial Parliaments, and I have done, till I hear what worthy of reply may fall from Gentlemen on the opposite side of the question. Triennial have never answered the expectation of the people: they were tried in the reign of Charles the First, retried in that of Charles the Second. In the time of William the Third, once more they were adopted, when they continued twenty years, till it ended in the detestable statute for septennial ones.

Our sensible humourist rose next, and politely assured the audience, that he was so deeply impressed with the truth, as it had been laid open and enforced by the last Speaker, he believed himself unable to add any thing new, consequently, would rest satisfied with making a few observations, which he would wish to be considered like an appendix to a book.

I remember to have read, Sir, that the men of Kent, finding themselves much aggrieved, with an Abbot at their head, equal to an Archbishop as things now run, opposed oppression; were inflexible in their purpose, till they obtained their request. We have not in these days the least chance of being honoured with a prelate to lead us forward, in order to obtain annual Parliaments, and equal representation. How

could we expect those dignitaries to be laborious, or to appear at the head of thousands, who have pulpits they never stood in, and the charge of souls they never, save once, visited; viz, at the time of their induction? Yet, on this account, let us not despair, since the truly great, the virtuous, and the learned, associate for our relief.

After all, Sir, Parliaments are annual in their business already, and only septennial in their election; for who doth not know, that things not finished in one session, must be begun de novo in the next. Whilst we complain, our trade is lost, we scruple not to confess, that in one sense, on the ruins of some branches, one entirely new hath arisen; namely, the selling of consciences; and none, save agents in the business, can tell what sums of money have been given, and received on this article. Now, if Parliaments were annual, I apprehend a man might hesitate to sell his soul at one year's purchase. That there existed laws to punish those convicted of such practices, he admitted. But what end did they answer? We have, on the whole, too many laws, and the one perplexes or perverts the other, under the notion of guarding and explaining them. I have myself, seen a statute to explain a statute, when it would have puzzled even a Dunning to tell, which of the two were the most unintelligible.

Nothing

Nothing need be added, to what has been so elegantly and learnedly said about rotten Boroughs. Who doth not know, that Old Sarum has but seven voters? What Briton's breast represents not such a circumstance, when to this we may add, that the populous town of Birmingham hath not one? If that, with such like towns, be virtually represented, then I am sure the other is viciously so? In a word, I am humbly of opinion, that the 513 members ought to be chosen by the quantum they pay of the land-tax.

The Gentleman who went next in the debate, and first alluding to the last Speaker, said, that though not a man of Kent, still he would venture to oppose the success of the question this evening, before the Society: the complex nature of it, ought to render us extremely cautious, in giving our sentiments upon it. Another ground of the same, is, Parliaments are one thing, equal representation another — whether immediately necessary, in order to effectual œconomy, and constitutional independance, might yield a debate. How far œconomy and constitutional independence are connected, might imply matter for another — and whether the safety and happiness of the people would be the result, is a point, as disputable, as any of the rest.

To confine ourselves, however, Mr. President, to the two points, which the Opener of the debate chiefly enlarged on, we allow each of them teems with singular effects. The query is,—Will they, if brought about, be for the good of the people? In the first place, when they demand annual Parliaments, don't they ask more than their right? I think they do. For, can they urge a title to that, which they themselves have avowedly, and in the face of the world, relinquished? Parliaments were once annual—we grant it: therefore, why dwell so much on this point?—ergo, they ought to be so again. This is no argument. Who altered it? The representatives of the people; consequently, it virtually was their deed. Antiently, we are told, business was transacted in a different and simple manner; perfectly adapted to the necessities of the times, and the genius of the people: whereas now, the artifices of men must be guarded against, which have multiplied with our various refinements. Our Kings know that they cannot act against the liberties of the people, without unhinging their own strength, and relaxing the sinews of their power. It is fashionable for patriots to load Administration with opprobrious epithets; but to gild them a little, something like probability, should as a mantle be given them. This surely is refused,
when

when the design of depopulating the kingdom is either directly or indirectly ascribed to the minister. Government can never mean depopulation.

A very ingenious, witty Gentleman, hath entertained us about the fee-simple of a man's soul; where he generously supposes a man would not sell it for one year's purchase. A very curious mode of reasoning, truly! just as if he should have humourously told us, that because seven may be divided into seven parts, therefore it is not seven,—the rudest farmer knows that seven times one is seven. Now, if he receives for his vote a proportionable part for one year, of what he used to get when the duration of Parliament was for seven years; I beg to know what use this can be of, towards the diminishing of undue influence? I should rather dread it would increase it; because, the elections coming round so swiftly, and the vicissitudes of life being so rapid, temptation brought near, required greater fortitude of mind, and integrity of heart, to withstand, than what the generality of men possess.

The same Gentleman wishes the matter fairly equated by the land-tax. This also would imply manifold difficulties; seeing in some countries it is paid according to acres—in others, by the

the number of houses—what is to be done in such cases ?

The Associations and County Meetings have received great praise this evening. However bold it may be to differ from the general opinion, permit me to say, there is no law for Associations ; though it must be granted, that custom is stronger than law.

The President of Coachmaker's-hall Society spoke next—shewed great ingenuity in complimenting the Opener of the question—owned his inability to enrich the arguments then adduced : yet would account it an honour, to be a small note on the margin. He wondered, how any man attempted to defend an Administration, already contemptible in the eyes of all Europe—odious to all good men—and totally disqualified for superintending the affairs of so great a nation. Name that, wherein they have succeeded, and I shall be among the first to join in their applause.

How, Sir, shall I express my surprize, at the objections started by the last Speaker, to Associations ? They are the result of our natural texture, and may be traced in the woods of America, as well as among civilized nations. They, in fact, are the dictates of humanity ; since nothing can be more expressive of the sense of injury, than the conviction we are under it. Here
the

the first step is to complain. The people of this country now feel, nay, they scarce exist, under the pressure of their aggravated calamities; and can we wonder, if their complaints are somewhat louder than ordinary ?

The grand objection to annual Parliaments, appears to be, the inconveniences attending county elections. But this is grounded on a supposition of the same contests prevailing then, as now. The absurdity of this reasoning is apparent : the cause being removed, the effects would not follow. Besides, if annual, it would not be worth a Minister's while to bribe, or indeed, to interfere ; seeing he could scarce carry any public disagreeable scheme into execution, ere there was a chance of his being thwarted.

The propriety of defraying the expences to members of Parliament, as was the usage in ancient and more virtuous days, had been hinted ; which he objected to, being derogatory to the dignity of a British Senator—without the plea of necessity, since plenty of Gentlemen of the strictest honour, possessed of opulent fortunes, who classed with their equals, would rejoice in the opportunity of serving their country, and dedicating their time and abilities, for her glory, and protection.

The fifth Speaker, paid a genteel compliment to the author of the question ; and, with his

usual vehemence, after a prolix introduction, replied to the defender of Government. The Gentleman told us, he was no Kentish-man — I really believe it ; — the conduct of these veteran yeomen, doth not suit the cast of his principles.

Can it be supposed, cried he, in an exulting tone of voice, that men of dignity, like the present Ministry, or indeed any in favour at court, would join in abridging the liberty of Britons ? Good God ! Sir, can he make a serious question of this ? Is there a school-boy ignorant, that in this kingdom there have been such, who may be seen gratis every day in the House of Lords and Commons ? He hath said, he doth not know if the people have a right to annual Parliaments ; — never before had I such a pitiful idea of his knowledge. I respect high rank — nor will I be found deficient in paying it the deserved tribute of reverence ; but I cannot worship an ass for the length of his ears. When interest on one hand, presses a needy or an avaricious Lord or Commoner, and when the rights of the people constitutionally demand, on the other, certain I am, the above specified individual hath reason to pray, Lead us not into temptation. — One sells his country, with his birthright, and the dearest privileges of Britons, for his mistress : another dangles through every kind of political pollution, after the heels of the Premier, in order

order to get something to allay the importunity of his creditors. One sighs for titles, and for ribbands; the other wants a country-house—horses—hounds—pictures—parks—ponds—inclosures, to gratify his pride or vanity; in the road to which, he forfeits honour—pledges truth—and endeavours the strangling of conscience.

The Gentleman thinks he hath carried his point, because he tells us, that seven times one is seven. I readily allow, that one may be bought for 500 l. as effectually as another for 5000 l.—what is that to the purpose? The deed, as to political guilt, and the violence done the inward principle of right and wrong, is equal in both.

The Gentleman, Sir, hath candidly told us, he doth not like Associations. I should wonder if he did. It is in the true stile and spirit of this Ministry to dislike them, and to use every means, concealed or open, to calumniate them. But what, Sir, do you call the assembly at Runnymede? Was not that an Association? And was it not a glorious one? In those days, as in the present, I dare say, many expressed their dislike to it? To that Association, however, Englishmen owe their noblest rights, and most valuable privileges.

One Gentleman dreads assemblies of the people, from their liableness to tumult, and aptness

to wander from their original design, into all manner of injustice and disorder; forgetting, that we seldom wonder at what is common. While things run in the channel they have done for some time past, a seat in Parliament, hath been a sort of fund for noble families, from which they provide for their otherwise destitute offspring. Younger sons particularly, having spent their lives, and what cash they had, in the grossest dissipation, get into Parliament; where they steadfastly eye the Minister, the polar star of their vote;—with the spirit of the constitution, they are unacquainted—on the great interests of the Empire they never rise; not altogether from wanting faculties, but from native indolence, disdaining closely to study those points. Their rule of conduct is this—let the Minister do what he will, provided he breaks no private engagements with us.

Were annual Parliaments to take place, men of wisdom and genius, influenced by the purest patriotism, would present themselves.—O, illustrious and immortal Chatham, how must Britain deplore thy fall! Surely, her genius, with thy pure patriot spirit, left the earth, nor would deign to guide, where counsels like thine did not assist!!!

The sixth Speaker, was an officer, who spake to this effect;

Mr:

Mr. President;

A physician examines attentively the malady, before he prescribes; nor will hazard his reputation by an opinion too hastily formed. Pursuing his method, let us examine the evil of septennial Parliaments, ere we point out the remedy. At first, they were a base usurpation on the rights of the people. There was but a step, nor that a difficult one, between a period of such duration, and their dependance on the Crown. O Sidney—Chatham—and all ye glorious spirits, who guarded and bled for Britannia's weal, even your souls would know a pause in bliss, were it possible for you to get acquainted, with the present abject situation of your much loved country.

Suppose Associations to be illegal — which, by the bye, we don't believe; only grant our antagonists the argument, for form's sake—What then? When the distresses of a people rise to such a height as ours have lately done, they become as extra-judicial in their effects, as the injuries which occasioned them. 'Tis not, we find, what a B—e, or a D—g, can say in the one House;—a R—d, or a S—e in the other, that can intimidate the Administration! If Administration can divert or repress the spirit that seems now awakening among all ranks of men; they may, at their leisure, excude chains as massy

as they please. Let Parliaments be annual, and our liberty shall be lasting : For should they dare to sell them, it can be but then for one year, after which we most assuredly possess the equity of redemption.

The Gentleman who spoke seventh, was a sensible citizen, whose accurate reasoning proved the futility of what illiterate merchants have frequently alledged in excuse for themselves, namely, that the hurry of business leaves no hours for mental improvement.

Mr. President,

I wonder how any Gentleman can defend this Administration, so lost to the principles of equity, and such strangers to the real and noblest interests of this country. Their former friends, I judged by this time, were ashamed to own them. It was an easy transition for my wonder, to perceive the Gentleman who attempted this, depreciated Associations, — which I affirm to be laudable, were it for no other reason, than that they have made bad Ministers tremble. It was urged—That the representatives of the people voted away annual or triennial Parliaments ; —but this hath no weight—the people, or their representatives, call it which you will, thought it expedient at that period. Does this preclude their using the same power again in a different manner ?

manner? No man in his senses will affirm it.

The electors at Cambridge were so cautious in their resolves, that they seemed wavering in the matter, till J—W—s told them, it was the opinion of Cambden and Dunning, that they were lawful. Consider their object, and then truly say, Sir, what is there to be dreaded from them? They crave a reform in the public expenditure;—they wish, from a zealous attachment to our glorious constitution, to diminish the influence of the Crown—to shorten the duration of Parliaments, and to have equal representation: is there any thing frightful in all this? or can the most ignorant doubt, that while the Crown hath the conferring of pecuniary places, undue influence will not be eradicated?

Our humour'd rose again, and replied to one Gentleman, who wish'd members of Parliament were brought back to that primitive state of integrity, when their constituents defrayed their charges—another judg'd this to be demeaning them.—After all, might it not be wiser in us to pay our servants, than tamely allow them to help themselves?

The truly intelligent friend of Administration, having patiently borne the buffetings of the evening, now begged leave to reply to the Doctor,

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about

about the Kentish association, and to several of that Gentleman's remarks; which, he appealed to the President, and to the society, if they had not been exceeding personal indeed. Notwithstanding the variety of arguments which have been adduced, the very popular declamation used, I am still of opinion, that an annual Parliament may do that, which would ruin the liberties of a people, equally, as a septennial one. If, in the latter case, it was a family fund, it would not cease to be so, when annual, though it might oblige a Peer, or man of landed interest, more gradually to provide for his family, or dependents. Again, I venture to affirm, that, if associations were perfectly broke, all would be well.

The opener of the question now claimed the privilege of concluding, though the hours of debate were ended.

Mr. President,

Associations, or county meetings, like those lately held by many counties, I must vindicate—nor scruple to call them, both legal and constitutional. May they be universal! Forbid there should be in England, a single county or corporation unanimated by the commendable spirit. With what pretext can they be deemed associations against the Crown; since, to maintain its lustre, with its every just prerogative, is the very basis of their meeting, and the soul of their resolves?

solves? Who doth not perceive one part,—alas! too great a one — of the empire, is irrecoverably lost; and the other, far advanced in a rapid consumption! When every countenance is dejected, and every heart desponds; — at such a crisis, shall we bid the people be silent? — With equal propriety go tell the wretch, agonizing on the wheel, to be chearful! — Is it language fit to be given to a man, all over smarting with wounds, to bid him be happy, that strangers may call him so! — At this very period, the luxury of individuals insults the public distress, which it hath most signally contributed to support.

Yes—my fellow citizens—the voice of nature—of reason—speak not only the legality, but demonstrate the utility of such meetings. Some have this evening, quibbled on the term duty, used in the question; the puerility of which must strike every one, who reflects that to be apparently neutral, much more to be really so, in the present alarming and divided state of the nation, must be highly criminal. This, however, I submit to the unbiaffed sense of this Society. Annual Parliaments, and equal representation, may be nominated the essence of the petitions. Let me then address your hearts and feelings as men, what is more, as Englishmen; remember all is at stake. — You may yet save them: —

but, O forget not, that a moment's delay may destroy you, as a people, for ever.

On the question's being put, it was carried almost unanimously, — That it is a duty to associate for the restoring of annual Parliaments, and equal representation.

A P R I L 24th, 1780.

Are there sufficient reasons to justify Englishmen, in continuing the Slave Trade?

AN amendment was proposed to this question, but rejected—viz; that Englishmen should be left out, and the trade in general considered. The Opener of the debate, with several others, contended, that the trade, as carried on by Englishmen, is contrary to interest — to policy—and to Christianity.

Their Opponents examined the original state of the Negroes—their misery—their frequent wars among themselves — with the probable advantages they may derive, from coming among civilized nations; especially, where the genius of the Gospel is known.

After a long and ingenious debate, it was decided—That there are not sufficient reasons to justify Englishmen, in continuing the Slave Trade.

M A Y

M A Y 1st, 1780.

Whether the Candidates for seats in Parliament, refusing to sign a test, obliging themselves to exert their endeavours, to obtain a reformation in the expenditure of the public money — the more equal representation — and shortening the duration of Parliaments — ought to be depended upon, as the sincere friends of the people ?

THE Author of the question, first spoke to tests in general. Secondly, to the three particulars, implied in the question ; in doing which, he strongly reprobated those candidates, who should prove recusants.

The first Speaker on the side of Ministry, enlarged on the profligacy, luxury, and want of principle, now pervading almost all ranks of men. Till a reformation took place here, he judged it to be totally nugatory, to find fault, with the mote in the eyes of Administration, while such beams remained in their own. — Declared, he was for a test—but a general one ; whereby he meant, our heartily and firmly joining, with lives and fortunes, to support Government against their manifold foes, in this trying period.

Numbers of Gentlemen, in various modes of reasoning, pursued these separate ideas :—and at last it was decided—That the Candidates ought to sign a Test, &c.

M A Y 8th, 1780.

What interest is the most susceptible of corruption, and consequently demands the most rigid and immediate reform—the Ecclesiastical, Civil, or Military?

THE success which the Westminster Forum, through the season, was crowned with, had given rise to an astonishing number of similar institutions, in the neighbourhood; each, doubtless, hoping to share the same. Some of them were indeed short-lived—and that for obvious reasons; though in the mean time they, perhaps, took off a few of our audience. The character of our Speakers, and the animation of the debates, fully compensated for this. The present evening proved this, to the conviction of all present. Good sense, and elegant satire, ran through the several speeches. And at last, it was decided—

That the Ecclesiastical is the most susceptible of corruption, and demands the most rigid and immediate reform.

M A Y

M A Y 15th, 1780.

Is not a federal union with America, the most desirable, at present, of all political events, next to the reformation of our internal policy?

THE ingenious Counsellor, who favoured us with the question, amidst other reasons, advised an Union—first, for its common interest; —then, for its safety; —and next, for its being requisite to our existence as a people.

His first Opponent disputed the truth of all three.—Respecting the origin of the war, alluded to by the learned Opener of the debate, I affirm, Sir, that it was the height of ingratitude, and of rebellion, on the part of the Colonies; whilst on that of Great Britain, it was nought but the enforcement of her just prerogative, and the legal demands of constitutional power. Never did a Mother-country do so much for Colonies, as this hath done for hers,—she weakened herself, that they might get strong, which strength—O barbarous return!—is now employed, in the bitterest manner, against that enfeebled parent.

This argument was well supported on both sides; at last decided, That a federal union with America, is the most desirable at present, &c.

M A Y 22d. 1780.

Is not giving a military command to a man, who hath never seen service, a discouragement to the army?

ABOUT this time, the appointment of Messrs. K—g, and F—n, to the command of Regiments, displeased the army; and ingrossed public conversation: to canvass the propriety of this measure, was the object of the question.

It was adopted, by Democritus; who said, it would be a strange thing to see the pig really roasting the cook, or the bullock skinning the butcher; yet not more preposterous in the nature of things, than setting a man to the head of a regiment, who knew nothing of service; and was an entire stranger to both manœuvres and military discipline. A Taylor at the Orery, or a Shoemaker set to explain the 47th proposition of the first book of Euclid, were not more disqualified; nor could look more confounded, than a man ordered to charge at the head of a troop, who had never seen a field of battle, or even bore a part in a review. Hea-
ven-

ven-born generals have now and then, astonished mankind ; after all, they fall not among us every day : they are nothing near so plenty, as geese or old women. It must be discouraging to men of spirit, to have such set over them. Besides, there are good men, by this conduct, shamefully neglected. This Gentleman, and other disputants on the same side, strenuously maintained the impropriety of the measure.

Their Opponents contended — that such commands were never given, but to new raised regiments ; consequently, no injustice was done to veteran officers. If these are new, the claim rests with the principal raisers of them. But all this, with many other acts of justice, are overlooked by some folks, merely that they may have a thrust at the Minister, or those in power: Truly, said the first defender of the expedient, I account it an unfortunate thing to be a Minister in this country ; for, were the angel Gabriel to deign the acceptance of the office, our modern Patriots would most assuredly arraign his administration. My sympathy would carry me much further, did I not recollect, that if the people of England had not a Ministry to hunt down, or at least to chase, they would pine away for want of exercise. The inconsistency of popular declamation, abundantly evinces this; one day extolling him, whom, perhaps, next month,

month, they reckon unworthy to live. On this account, I judge it unnecessary to enter into a formal vindication of characters, that are attacked, merely from the situation in which they are placed.

After a spirited debate, it was decided,— That such a step is a discouragement to the army.

M A Y 29th, 1780.

Would it not have been highly proper, in the present state of naval affairs, to have appointed Sir Hugh Palliser to the command of the Channel Fleet, notwithstanding the public clamour against him?

THIS being the last meeting at the Forum, for the season, added to the popularity of the question, brought together a genteel company; and a spirited debate ensued. The Author of the question contended, that a commander in chief, should be a man of courage—of knowledge—and of experience;—more especially, in the naval line; since, whatever prodigies we have heard about generals, I never heard of a Heaven-born

ven-born seaman in my life. 'Tis practice which constitutes a sailor. Is not Sir Hugh possessed of all the above? His bitterest enemies dare not hint a suspicion to the contrary! A train of successes, nor a few of them encompassed with hazardous risks, have proved him an officer of the most consummate skill in maritime affairs. Some will tell me, he brought a groundless charge against his superior officer. What has that to do with his abilities, as a commander? Those best acquainted with martial law, nay, a great part of the House of Commons in conjunction with them, are of opinion, that it was incompetent in the court to point out the motive; thereby affixing a stigma on his character. If such things can be rubb'd off, why deny him an opportunity of effecting it? His own feelings would prompt him to glory, till he removed the aspersions thrown upon him: or should that be impossible, till he forced his countrymen to confess, that he had made a full and noble recompence, by essential services performed.

The first Speaker on the opposite side, agreed with the last, about the qualities requisite in a commander:—But I apprehend, Mr. President, they are not all—one principal one omitted, is, that he should have the esteem and confidence of his country, and of those in particular, whom
he

he commands : in a word, that he should be popular. Ere he can be obeyed with readiness, or followed with intrepidity, it is necessary that the sailors should love him. I likewise differ from the last Speaker, relative to the motive. I say, it was proper for the court to examine, and to declare it, in order to do justice to the injured character, and by affixing guilt to the truly guilty, warn others to avoid the same excess of ambition, lest it might betray them into a like snare. Where lay the injustice, or even impropriety ? Did not Palliser bring evidence ? Of what ? That he was right. — Far from it — only that he was not capitally wrong.

Numbers ranged themselves on both sides ; and at last it was carried, That it would be highly improper to appoint Sir Hugh Palliser, &c.

The impatience of the Ladies and Gentlemen, who are subscribers to these volumes, to see them, is the sole reason, why a minute account of the last six evenings debates hath not been given. Permit me to hope, the generous public will the more readily acquiesce in this, when I assure them, if the present is approved, a third volume — beginning with the consideration of the last six questions *de novo*, and further, containing many letters, with a discussion by the President, of those questions, which were admitted

admitted, but never debated—on the same kind of paper and type, shall, in the course of the summer, be published.

The above being the last evening for the season, as hath been already said, the President addressed the audience in the few following words :

Gentlemen,

It would be exceeding improper in me, at this late hour, to take up much of your time, especially after the spirited argument, which hath this evening been supported. Suffer me to mention a few particulars, which both justice and gratitude enjoin.

The company who have established this institution, have been of a class uncommonly genteel, and lovers of good order. As a proof, no riot or very singular disturbance hath ever happened. What a satisfaction to yourselves!—and an honour to me; who beg leave to return my grateful tribute, for the uniform support given me; also, in the name, and at the express desire of the proprietor, to present his sincerest thanks, for your kind attendance and patronage.

The Gentlemen Speakers most meritoriously claim a peculiar meed of praise. It would be difficult

difficult to say, whether they have done greater service to us, or honour to themselves.

This society, therefore, Gentlemen, stands prorogued till sometime in September next, of which the public shall be respectfully informed.

On this, the President was desired to leave the chair; as the Gentleman who made the request, said, he had a motion to make, and wished the Speaker who sat close by it, to take it for a little. The Society coinciding with the proposition, the President left it, when it was thus moved,

“ That the thanks of this Society be given to the worthy President, in the most liberal and expressive manner, for his strict impartiality, so visible on every occasion; for his great accuracy in the discharge of his public duties, and prudent conduct displayed in the management of the Society; for his indulgence and encouragement to young or bashful speakers, with his most evidently unwearied assiduity to please.”

The Vice-president for the time being, took the sense of the Society on the motion; which was resolved unanimously: whereupon the reverend Mr. T——r was again called in, and
from

from the chair addressed to the above import.
—After this he bowed, first to the Vice-president, then turning round to the company, in the most respectful manner assured them, how deeply he was impressed, with the sense of their present additional favour.

F I N I S.



MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM